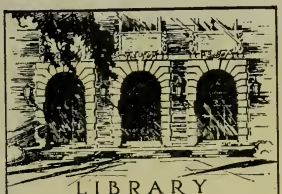
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THE

DARK FALCON.

A TALE OF THE ATTRUCK.

By J. B. FRASER, Esq.

AUTHOR OF

"THE KUZZILBASH," "ALLEE NEEMROO," &c.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

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PREFACE.

A FEW words respecting the character and object of the following work may prove neither useless nor uninteresting to those who honour it with a perusal. It relates to a period of much interest in the modern history of Persia, when that country was convulsed and made a theatre of bloodshed, treachery, and crime, by the struggle for the throne between the powerful families of the Zend and the Kajar. The events and incidents it narrates are all historically correct;—the characters of the principal personages are drawn not merely from written and historical authorities, but from the information of contemporary individuals who bore a part in the busy scenes that are described, and were connected by

blood or by service with the chief actors in them ; and all the anecdotes of these personages have the same authentic origin.

The struggles and domestic feuds of the noble Kajar family, with many of the events which these gave rise to, had long engaged the Author's attention as calculated to afford subjects of great interest for a narrative, and particularly that which forms the catastrophe of the present work. All these, in so far as they fall within its scope, are described with strict adherence to truth ; and the circumstances connected with the arrest of the fiery Mustapha Koolee, and the murder of the gallant Jaaffer Koolee Khan, were taken from the mouths of living eye-witnesses, including old Mustapha Koolee himself, who died only some twenty years ago.

Of the story which serves to connect the historical and more important events of the work, the Author has only to remark, that he has endeavoured on this, as on all former occasions, to make it a vehicle for conveying descriptions of a

country and of the character and habits of a people which have at all times excited considerable interest in Europe; and there are few travellers in the East who can have failed to witness more or less of the gloomy superstitions, or to hear some of the wild imaginative legends, which afford the ground-work of the more mysterious passages of the tale.

The Author's object, then, has been to present, in a more attractive shape than that of a mere narrative of rather repulsive facts, certain remarkable events of Persian history; conveying, at the same time, to his readers as lively a picture as he could of the characters and motives of the principal actors, and of the manners, customs, and feelings of the people. How he has succeeded in his purpose his readers must determine. He is aware that the interest once felt in Oriental tales has of late become rather diminished—there is perhaps somewhat of a sameness in their subjects which may have palled upon the public appetite; and no doubt, literary, like other tastes, are liable

to change. Be that as it may, he is not likely to tresspass again upon the public patience. Grateful for, and contented with, the degree of indulgence he has already experienced on so many occasions, he would take his leave and retire before that kindly feeling may be quite worn out; well pleased if, more fortunate than the celebrated Archbishop of Toledo, his last work shall escape being pronounced by his readers to "*smell of the apoplexy.*"

THE DARK FALCON.

CHAPTER I.

A WINTER PIECE.

A COLD and gusty day of February was drawing near its close; and the clouds which had been driven fiercely over the face of heaven by the breath of the tempest — like the scattered squadrons of a beaten host, were abating of their speed; and parting here and there to display a glimpse of the blue vault above them, when the inhabitants of the village of Serderreh, tempted by the transient gleam, came forth from the dark, though warm habitations in which the inclemency of the weather had confined them during the morning, and repaired to an open space without the gateway, where they could sit and smoke, and converse together at their ease, and speculate upon the weather, the times, and other subjects of interest.

The village itself lay ensconced in a picturesque hollow, in one of the magnificent passes that lead from the low country of the province of Asterabad, to the higher regions of Irâk; and just beyond the line, where the dense forests that clothe the northern skirts of the Elburz mountains are lost in high pastoral tracts, which in their turn terminate in lofty peaks and ridges. From many points in the ascent, the traveller's eye might range over a vast extent of darkly wooded mountains, rising beneath him in undulating grandeur, and sinking into a plain, equally well clothed with verdure, and scarcely distinguishable from the blue Caspian, which melted into air on the far horizon. Above, rose the huge barrier of the Elburz, cleft into innumerable ridges by ravines of stupendous depth and terrific wildness.

Each of these ravines was the bed of a stream which was swelled by innumerable springs and smaller rills from the enclosing mountains, until rising high into their bosom, the main trunk was lost in a multitude of branches. It was just above the forks of one of these streams, and near the head of a principal branch, that the village we speak of lay nestled: its dwellings rising in ter-

races upon a steep bank of rock and fertile soil; and the harmonious intermingling of its, houses and orchards with the straggling cultivation which covered the ground, both around and below the village walls, formed a picture of natural beauty that could not be surpassed. The opposite bank, precipitous and rough, and glittering with many rills of living water, was sprinkled with brush-wood and rocks; and rose high into a group of fantastic peaks, one of which towered above the rest, and was seldom seen without a wreath of vapour curling round its brow.

On the whole, it was a pleasant and secluded spot; shut out, one might have imagined, from the world and its bustle—responsive to no sounds but the ceaseless murmur of the waters, and the mysterious voice of the surrounding mountains. But such was far from being the case; for the ravine was the channel of a pass by which a great traffic was carried on between the upper and lower country; and the village of Serderreh being a principal halting-place for the muleteers who carried it on, it was pretty generally filled with members of that rude, though useful fraternity; and the tinkling of mule-bells, the shouts of their drivers, their loud abuse, and

vehement altercations with the inhabitants, were ever mingling in strange discord with the melodious and more congenial music of the place.

At the time in question, the scene though invested perhaps with more of grandeur, was stripped by the unpropitious season of much of its natural beauty; for the orchard trees and bushes were leafless, and the snow which completely covered the heights, descended in long streaks and wreaths on their sides, while that which had newly fallen, had left its powdery film on ridge and hollow, down to within a few hundred feet of the village. Yet, nevertheless, its inhabitants, as we have said, hailing the gleam which had just broke through the leaden clouds, had crawled forth from their lairs, and wrapped in their *poosteens*, or long sheepskin cloaks, took their seats on the accustomed terraces of clay, or on the dry ground beside the gateway. There at their ease, the elders passed the calleeoons to one another, and the young men spun their ropes of hair, while all talked together with the eagerness and vivacity so universal among their countrymen.

While thus employed, a lad who had been posted on a height to watch the cattle and pre-

vent them from straying, came hastily down and informed the ketkhodah, or head man, that he had seen from his post a party of horsemen making their way up the glen toward the village.

"Good," replied the ketkhodah; "a caravan no doubt; Kara Eussuff is expected from Asterabad, with a hundred mules and yaboos, loaded with skins of butter, and bags of corn.—He will be welcome."

"This is no caravan," said the lad; "there are not above a dozen persons, and all of them are mounted. They get too fast over the ground for a caravan."

"Then who can they be, in Allah's name?—how far may they be off?" said the ketkhodah.

"Scarce a quarter of a fursuck," replied the lad; "but who they may be, God knows."

"It is some of these Kajars, no doubt," said an old man with a bushy red-dyed beard, "they are always on the move. Who but they could be mounting the pass at this time, seeing it is no caravan?"

"Had we not better shut the gate, Baba Allee, till we know who they are?"

"Patience comrade, till we hear something

more; no good in provoking these fiery fellows by shewing them shut gates. If there are but a dozen of them, we can deal with them by fair means or foul; please God they prove of the right sort."

"Ay, Allah keep us from rebels! they take, and pay not even with thanks; whatever they touch is burnt. As for our chief and his friends, God send him success! He is the Ryot's protector; whatever is taken for him goes by account, and we may look for some allowance at reckoning day."

"Right, Baba; what care these ghorumsangs but for their own profit and pleasure; nothing will they want, when might can seize what they require. All is gain to them, for we are as dirt under their feet; now the Khan, may his shadow increase! regards us as his children; if they are ruined, he knows the loss is his own in the end; for where is he to get money and food, but from us? Would to Allah, his success were complete! for then we should have peace and rest."

"Ahi friend! that time is far off yet, I fear; for this Mustapha Koolee Khan, who is now setting the country in a blaze, is neither ass nor coward; but a stiff-necked mule who can kick

hard; a very Roostum for fighting; and there are many who have placed their hands upon his skirts, and account a stout handed soldier better suited to rule Iram, than one like our Aga, whose misfortune, according to their account, unfits him for reigning at all. By your own lives, agas, this man divides the Kajars with his highness, ay, and much of the country; depend upon it, the game will not be played out so soon."

"Well, that may be, Baba; but those who follow Mustapha Koolee reckon by a false account. Brave he is, and stout,—ay, and a liberal chief, how else should he have won so many hearts and hands from our Aga? But little do they know Aga Mahomed Khan; after all, he is the true prince, the wise, the prudent, the trustworthy; his head will beat the other's sword out of the field yet, stick to him who may; it cannot be otherwise. And then remember the treachery of Mustapha; think of his taking service with these Zeuds—the savages, against his own tribe, against his elder brother. Allah-il-Allah!—is that to be forgiven? Rest assured that will come up against him in the end; and he will be abandoned and betrayed himself,—ay, and Moorteza also, for he took

the same part,—both were traitors. But would to Allah, as you say, that the game were at an end! for what has Muzunderan and Asterabad been since it began, but a hell?"

"Ay, comrades, the mushedee has said the truth; traitors they are, and with traitors they consort—like to like. A wonderful villain that Jaaffer Khan Zeud. But here comes Allee Cootchick. "Well, Batchah, what news?—what have these sharp eyes of yours made out?"

"I would represent, Aga, that the matter is as I stated. Just as I came down I saw the horsemen appearing from the bushes at the turn below. There are twelve of them, all armed too, for I saw the gleam of a sword, or a spear; and there are two yeduks* besides. They will be here immediately, for they rode fast, as men in haste."

"And could you make out no more?"

"Nothing, Aga, except that they wear the Kajar cap instead of the turban, or Toorkoman head-gear."

"Ay, Kajars they are, no doubt; we may as well prepare for the worst, too; yet they can hardly be going to Bostam, or even to Damghan,

* Led horses.

by this road at such a time; but after all, who can tell the tricks of such rogues. See Batchah, look to the cattle and sheep, keep all on the hill-face behind yonder; and take the mare and her foal to the hollow among the bushes. Let the women have an eye to the corn ambâras,* and valuables, and let everything be made snug before they turn the corner."

Practice makes perfect. The villagers in these quarters were accustomed to such *alèrtes*, so that this affair was taken easily; many of the young men departed in haste different ways, and there were a few minutes of rapid, but not noisy bustle. A like activity prevailed for a while within the dwellings, but the old men remained in their places, quietly smoking their pipes, and by the time the strangers had turned the last corner in sight of the village, and were seen rapidly approaching the gateway, the whole arrangements were complete, and the place and all belonging to it wore the aspect of perfect security.

The travellers, twelve in number, as the boy had reported, were headed by a leader of striking mien. Above the common height, his frame, though shrouded in the thick folds of an Affghan

* Stores.

poosteen, was obviously powerful and muscular, and his features, fully displayed beneath the black lambskin cap, bore the well known characteristics of the noble Kajar tribe. Eyes of the deepest hazel beamed forth with bold intelligence from under their dark and arched brows, and a nose of the finest proportions rose above lips half hid in the full black beard that clothed the lower portion of his oval countenance. Constant exposure to the winds and storms of heaven had deepened the ruddy brown of a once clear complexion, and furrowed the cheeks with some stronger lines than properly belonged to their years; for the firm elastic port gave no token of age; and spite of the lofty bearing, and a shade of thought which would sometimes cross the noble brow, the general expression of the countenance bespoke a frank and kindly nature, and beamed with a joyous and unsuspicious goodwill, that belonged rather to the fresh enthusiasm of early youth, than the sober and cautious self-command which marks the man of forty winters.

This personage bestrode a powerful courser, from whose silver-mounted saddle-bow depended holsters of crimson velvet, and the point of a black-sheathed and steel-mounted scymitar might

be seen hanging beneath the skirt of his sheep-skin cloak. The rest of the party, obviously his attendants, were more heavily armed; each, in addition to the sword at his waist, carrying a matchlock and shield at his back; and all were well mounted on powerful horses, or strong built serviceable yaboos.

As the leader, on mounting the last terrace, pushed his horse more swiftly towards the gate-way, the men who on his approach had risen from their seats, advanced, and making a low obeisance, gave him the welcome in Turkish; and the ketkhodah in particular moving forward with alacrity took hold of his stirrup, and addressing him in warm and respectful terms, stood ready to assist him in alighting.

"Ahah! Baba Allee, art thou there?" said the traveller; "How goes it?—art well, old man?"

"May your favour never diminish! may your prosperity increase! we live under your highness' shadow, you have brought light to our eyes; be pleased to alight, a munzil shall be ready ere you shall have smoked a calleeoon."

"Ah, no—no Baba, that cannot be just now; we have a long way before us, and little time to

go it in ; we can but give our beasts a mouthful of corn and then push on."

"Astafferullah !" replied the ketkhodah ; "push on to night—and in such weather ?—it is impossible—it cannot be. Bismillah ! set foot to ground, Khan, and be pleased to walk in."

"No, no, old man, it cannot be. I tell you that to stop is impossible, and all we shall want here is a guide. Here, Allee Beg ! Mustapha ! Jan Koolee ! dismount and rub your horses down ; give them their nose-bags ; put a few handfuls of corn on the straw ; old Baba Allee there will furnish it,—but what was that you said of the weather, old man ? won't it hold up ? how is it in the pass think you ?"

"It has been bad enough here, and must have been far worse above, Aga ; we have had storm all last night, and a heavy fall of snow,—see, all is white, almost down to the walls. There has been much drift, too, for the wind was high ; no doubt the road is blocked up."

"Well, if it is so, we must force it, for get through I must ; you have capital guides here, and I must have the best of them, and then, Jah ullah !"

"Ahi Aga ! what can the best of guides do in

ten gez deep of snow? See how it drifts from yon ridge; and the storm is rising again; there will be another fall before an hour passes. The *booraun** is in the mountains already, Aga. Allah-il-Allah! you would be overwhelmed before you went a fursuck."

"Be it so, if it must be — we can but try. Who are the last that came the road?"

"No one has reached us from the other side these three days, Aga; but four hours ago, a small caravan started from hence, to try the pass, and they carried with them our two best guides; but they can never get on. They will leave their loads, and return, no doubt, or take shelter under the rocks—we look for them, indeed, every moment."

"Ah! if muleteers with loaded beasts, could think of it, shame on us if we can't make it fully out—we shall have their track, too, to help us on; come old friend, bestir yourself, let us have the guide, and then 'Khodah hafiz.'"

"My lord, be persuaded; by your own august head! the thing is impossible—not one guide have we here who would attempt the Cothul

* A fierce drifting wind that often drives the snow in heaps on the mountains when all is calm below.

now; wait but an hour, and you will see the muleteers back, if—which Allah forbid!—they be not already buried. See only how it blows yonder. Their track! what track could remain for a moment with such a drift as that?"

"Well, it does blow hard; but I must nevertheless push on; it is a case of necessity, not of choice—my business will brook no delay, so do you set about yours, old man. Open your eyes, summon the guide, and let us be going. I know something of the road myself; so does Jan Koolee; but this snow may puzzle us both: so no more loitering; and hark you, no more excuses, the thing must be. See, our horses have eaten up their mouthfuls already."

"It is well, my lord, I have not a word more. On your own head be it—Baba Allee is blameless. Heif! heif! alas, alas! as for a guide, Wullabillah, I know not, all our best are absent. If, indeed, you could overtake the Cafilah!"

"We shall overtake it, man. But by my soul, it does look villanously," added he, casting a glance upwards at the hills which again began to be obscured by fast driving clouds, from which the roar of the wind could be heard in heavy gusts, and the snow was bolted forth, as

by the breath of a tornado. "Well, we must prepare for it. Here, Jan Koolee, and you, Mustapha, your horses are fresh. Allee Beg, do you take the brown yaboo; he is as strong as an elephant—leave all loads and stuff behind, I will mount the dark bay myself; we four will try it, and push through, no doubt. The rest will remain here for the night, and come on at daylight, when the horses shall be fresh. Some caravan will surely be up by that time. So a calleeoon, Baba Allee, and we are off."

The attendants called upon were too well accustomed to obedience to dispute their master's orders, and though fully awake to the desperate nature of the service they were about to attempt, now set to work in earnest to complete the needful preparations; and, after some minutes of rapid bustle, announced themselves as ready. "Good," said their master, "but where is the guide?"

After a further short delay, which caused much impatience in the traveller—as daylight was fast waning, a young man was dragged forward like a culprit to punishment, bitterly remonstrating against the whole proceeding, and protesting with a hundred oaths that they were forcing him and

themselves to certain destruction—nay, to death itself. But finding all in vain, he sat down sulkily, tied up his feet in many folds of woollen rags, filled his coarse buckskins with hay before stuffing in his feet—drew tight the girdle round his loins, threw another cloak over his shoulders; and taking in his hand a stout pole, without further ceremony moved forward up the hill, muttering as he went, to relieve his mind of the displeasure he dared not express more explicitly.

The leader himself had not neglected his preparatives; for he also gathered his garments more closely about his person, pressed his cap more firmly on his head, tied a handkerchief round his neck, and having fixed himself firmly in his saddle, with the skirts of his sheepskin well tucked in about his limbs, he threw a kind word or two at parting to his host, who mingled his blessings and farewells with many upbraidings for his imprudence, and pushed on after the guide, followed by his three chosen associates, who all looked as if they would fain have remained at the village, and threw many a wistful glance at the cheerful blazes which now began to be visible from every open door. But it was in vain; so they too girthed cloaks and jubbas

round them, tied up heads and faces from the bitter blast, and striking their heels into their horses' sides were soon at their masters back.

For some small space, the path, winding up the steep bosom of the hollow, derived some shelter from the orchards and inclosures of the village; and even after these were passed, as it crossed the gravelly scaurs, and among the scattered rocks and bushes that sprinkled the acclivity, the rising shoulder of a projecting height still continued to afford them some protection; but on crossing this point the travellers found themselves at once exposed, upon the bleak mountain side, to the unmitigated force of a fierce wind that was now bringing the snow flakes and drift fast in their faces. The ground beneath their feet was covered with that which had already fallen, and its depth increased at every step, while all trace of a path was quite obliterated. The guide, however, still held forward without wavering; and thus did the party proceed in silence, each occupied in securing himself against the gusts which threatened to hurl horse and man over the precipice: until after an hour's continual struggle with the increasing difficulties of the way, they succeeded in reaching a loftier

hollow which lay before them as far as their eyes could reach, in one unbroken waste of snow. But night had now set in, and even the nearest heights could scarcely be discerned through the deepening gloom, increased as it was by the snow-drift that filled the air.

The horses harassed by the buffeting wind, and the depth of the snow, began already to shew tokens of distress, and the guide to betray symptoms of uncertainty and uneasiness, which communicated themselves to some at least of the attendants as, on crowning the difficult ascent, this cheerless prospect greeted their view. The guide, indeed, appeared more than half inclined to come to a stand; but the leader, in a cheerful though decided tone, demanding What the matter was? and shouting out "Onwards! onwards! or we shall get benighted," he continued his way, floundering through the deep unbroken snow, sounding for the path with his staff, and often sinking into unseen hollows, while the horses equally perplexed, stumbled and started, and plunged along, in a manner that made their progress every moment more slow and uncertain.

At this point of the way the ears of the party

were greeted by the sound of mule-bells ; and, in due time, emerging from the dim grey obscurity, advanced a string of mules, some being bestridden by riders, while others had their pack-saddles empty, the muleteers running on foot behind them.

"Alhumdulillah ! Praise be to God ! this is fortunate," exclaimed the guide ; "it is an escape from death ! we can now return in safety along with these Cherwadars whom Allah has sent to our assistance ; these empty mules will clear the way for us bravely. In the name of God, Aga, let them pass, and turn with them. Allah will not suffer us to advance. See he has shut up the way in front, and opened it for us to retire. Bismillah ! "

"Art thou a fool ?" demanded the leader, sternly ; "dost thou imagine I have come thus far to be scared back by the folly of a coward ? As we have come, so shall we proceed ; so on with you ghorumsang—bismillah ! "

"Allah ! Allah ! it is impossible ! Look, Aga, look at that sky,—look at this snow,—listen to that bourân which drifts it into mountains, —see these men who have tried it and failed,—men that have been at this work since their

childhood, and how can we hope to make it out? at night too!—*keâmut!* Ahi, comrade," cried he to one of the approaching muleteers, "how is the road? where are you bound?"

"The road is closed—there is no road—no passing this night, and we are returning to the village: better that than lose life and goods in the snow."

"Hear ye that, Aga? In the name of Allah, listen to reason! These men are no cowards in the snow,—no, by your own soul! but they know better than to face it in such a night as this. Be satisfied: for the sake of the blessed Imaum Reza, return with them; and try the road with fresh cattle, and plenty of them, to-morrow."

"Be silent, beast; I want your guidance, not your counsel. The track of these men is as open for us to advance by as it would be for retreat; and retreat, as thou wilt find, is not much in my way; push on, ere it be again closed up by this wind."

"Closed? Ai Aga! it is closed already; see how the snow runs along the ground filling every hollow! Ai Vahi! Ai Vahi! it is ten gez deep in the Dehineh, and who could stand on the heights to-night?"

"Ay, it will be deep enough if we linger thus. Hoh, brothers! where left ye your loads? is there any one along with them?"

"Ay, ay! they all lie half a fursuck on from hence—under the rocks by the katerjee's stone—three of our men are with them."

"It is well; we shall find them, Inshallah!" And the muleteers having swept by with their beasts, the chief waving the guide with a threatening and impatient glance to move on, the party struck into the track of the mules, and proceeded as rapidly as the obstacles in their way would permit. Their speed, however, which of necessity was small from the first, soon diminished; for, as the guide had foretold, the track became totally obliterated by the torrent of drift which poured along the surface, before the furious gusts that swept the lonely valley; and even where a vestige remained, it served rather to perplex than to aid the travellers; for the feet of their horses would frequently sink so deep into the holes made by those who had preceded them, that the riders had to dismount before the animals could be extricated. The wind too continued to buffet them unceasingly, and men and horses already fatigued, became still more exhausted by

the painful work. Even the Khan's powerful Toorkoman shewed symptoms of distress.

Upwards of an hour had been spent in these struggles, and yet the party had neither cleared the valley nor reached the katerjee's stone. At length one of the horses, deviating from the pathway, sunk with his rider quite out of sight in the snow. This brought the rest to a stand still. With infinite difficulty, by clearing away above, the fallen rider having fortunately contrived to extricate himself from his horse and raise himself upon its back, he was dragged by his companions from his unpleasant predicament. But to raise the horse was found beyond their power. The animal had unhappily sunk into a hollow filled either with melted snow, or with the water from some spring; and was too much spent, to aid by its own exertions the efforts of those who attempted to raise it. They were thus forced to abandon it to its fate, while the dismounted rider, weary as he was, had to follow the party on foot.

This accident struck a damp on the rest, and they were almost in despair, when the leader, breaking the moody silence he had for some time maintained, exclaimed, "A light! by my father's soul, a light!"

Alhumdulillah!" responded the guide; "it must be in the cavern. It is, no doubt, the watchmen of the loads left by the katerjees. In the name of Allah, let us join them! we shall find fire and food with them, at all events." And, exhilarated by the hope of even a temporary relief from suffering, every man mustered his failing strength and pressed forwards, while even the horses appeared to have caught some fresh spirit and exerted themselves anew; so that, after another hard struggle, the whole party reached the spot where the light still beamed forth with welcome lustre.

At the termination of the plain or valley through which they had, at length, won their way, the summits of the mountains again closed in upon the narrow ravine, and there rose, from the bank of the little rill that trickled through it, a huge mass of rock projected from the mountain, which, beetling over its base, overhung a confined strip of ground, which was thus kept clear of snow; and though the howling blast might bring with it abundance of drift,—so thick, indeed, as to hide from view the superincumbent height, —it rested not within, being swept out ere it fell by the strong eddy wind which gambolled round

the interior of the cavern. On this half-sheltered space were heaped a number of bales and packages, disposed in such a manner as to form a screen from the tempest, while others strewed the ground beyond and were half covered with snow. Within the space thus defended there blazed a fire, the light from which had cheered the travellers, and round it sat four men wrapped in cloaks of sheepskin.

The noise of the wind prevented those in the cavern from hearing the approach of the travellers until they were close at hand, when the muleteers rose abruptly, and, seizing their arms, demanded loudly who they were and what they sought; nor was it till after the guide had been duly recognized, and his assurance that they were peaceable and benighted travellers reiterated, that the sturdy guardians of the goods would permit them to approach. Being satisfied, however, they at once made room by the fire; when the commanding figure of the leader, as he advanced and stood forth in its light, produced a powerful impression, and a sensible increase of courtesy and ready service. Food was offered, but the saddlebags of the attendants furnished a sufficiency to stop the cravings of appetite, which was all that

the chief, at least, appeared to require, for scarce had he warmed his limbs and swallowed a few mouthfuls of victuals, when he began to inquire into the nature and state of the road, and the distance there might be to the first village on the other side the Cothul, naming it.

The men, in reply to his questions, mentioned the distance, and described the nature of the road as in common times, but added, that any attempt to reach the village, after so heavy and fresh a fall of snow, must for the present prove fruitless, as the combined efforts of a large caravan would now be requisite to force the way through the wreaths of drift which must everywhere block up the valleys.

"Ay, my men," said the leader, "you talk now of loaded cattle; but stout fellows such as you, if well paid for it, and the matter were of moment, would easily make your way where a caravan would stick fast.—Hah?"

"Money might make us do much, Aga," replied one of the men, "and necessity still more; but neither the one nor the other, nor both together, would carry a man safe over the Gurdun-e-Ghaur-e-Chuppun to-night. By the head of the Prophet! there are two spears' depth of snow

in the pass now, and it is still drifting and falling."

"Nevertheless, I must attempt it, friend, and that without more delay; for cross the mountain I must before morning; and here are ten tomauns in gold for the man who helps me through the pass. Come, Bismillah! who is for the cash?"

The men were silent, as they gazed upon the speaker, and then looked at each other: and the chief's followers, with faces all aghast, could not suppress their groans and exclamations of alarm. After the pause of a minute, the elder of the muleteers took up the discourse, and said, "Aga, you are no doubt a rich and powerful man, and have your reasons for so much anxiety to perform an impossibility; *we* are poor fellows, who fain would earn a *baksheesh*, such as you have offered; but by your own august head, there is not one of us, who would venture to provoke the wrath of Allah, by attempting to cross the Shah-koh in such a night of judgement as this. In an evil hour did you leave the village, Aga, but your star has been powerful in bringing you, even to this poor shelter.—Tempt your destiny no further; remain with us till morning, and then, please God, we shall see what may be done."

"Well, friend," returned the chief, "no doubt you mean well, but your good-will alone can do me little service. Proceed I must; and you may judge of the necessity of the case, from seeing me resolved, even in such weather, to attempt the thing myself, if I can get no one else to shew me the way—Hoh Batchahs! you that can, follow; those who cannot, remain here, and come on with the cafilah."

"In the name of God, my lord!" said the man whom the chief had addressed as Allee Beg, "consider for a moment what you are about to do. No doubt of the urgency of your business—no doubt we must press forwards; but should life be lost in the attempt, what profit could then be? The evil caused by a little delay may be repaired, but what could compensate for *your* loss?

"Pshah, Allee Beg, are you also turned coward? What should I be worth, were I always to calculate chances so nicely? But stay, if you fear to go on; stay with the rest; the guide and I will make it out ourselves."

"May God forbid, Aga!" replied Allee Beg calmly, taking up the arms which he had cast aside on approaching the fire. "I am ready in

your service, ready for what it may please Allah to send—Bismillah!"

"Afereen! that is more like thee, man; then come with us. Hoh you guide! get on before—do you hear?" and the chief beckoned for his horse, which was held by another of his attendants.

"Ahi, God forbid! Amaun, Amaun! though the Aga be mad, I am not—none but a madman would dream of such a thing. Cut me in pieces, Aga, if you will, but your guide this night I cannot and will not be. I am neither jin nor deeve to flit about in such weather, among the storms and snows of the Shah-koh, Wullah!"

"Hah, ghorumsang! do you rebel? Hoh there Jan Koolee, seize and place him in front—prick him with your spears if he move not. By the soul of my father, go he shall!"—but on the attempt being made, the man threw himself on the ground, grovelling and roaring like a frighted bull; while the chief, divided between indignation and laughter, now abused the miserable man, and now re-iterated his orders to force him forwards. The muleteers, to whom he was well known, rose one and all, to remonstrate, and appeared strongly inclined to more active in-

terference, when a young man, the fourth of their party, who though he had taken no part in the conversation, had continued unceasingly to gaze upon the chief, started from his seat, and stepping between the guide and his tormenter, exclaimed, "Let him alone, by your souls,—a dog can be but a dog, you will never make him a lion; if the Aga be resolved to go, Bismillah! here am I ready to attend and guide him; the road is dangerous, the storm is fierce, and we may die; but he shall not die alone, nor shall he want a guide."

The tone, not less than the appearance of the young man, as he stood forth with free undaunted air, in striking contrast to the grovelling creature at his foot, arrested the chief's attention; and he was about to express his admiration, and to inquire who he might be, when the old muleteer interfered, exclaiming, "Ahi, Batchah! what news is this?—hast thou gone mad also? When men like us refuse to put a finger to the job, is it for thee, a beardless boy, to think of undertaking it? money must be scarcer with thee than brains, it seems. What dirt is this thou would'st eat, hah?"

"And who art thou, fellow, who dares to in-

terfere with the youth?" demanded the chief, with stern voice and darkening brow. "If thou art coward, must thou seek to turn his blood to water also? Be silent — thou hadst best —" "Afereen youth! thou art a bold one, and I like thee well; thou shalt not have cause to repent thine offer. Allah ever protects the brave; and we shall both of us live, please God, to help thee to better work than muleteering. But, come; if thou art ready, let us lose no more time—Bismillah!"

Without another word, the young man began his preparations. Girding around him, and tucking up the skirts of the Toorkoman jubba which he wore, and tying his broad-topped sheepskin cap with a handkerchief fast upon his head, and drawing tighter the thongs of his leathern sandals, he grasped a long stout club, and stood ready to set forth. The Khan looked at him for a moment by the flickering blaze of the fire; he could perceive, even through his loose wrappings, that the figure of the youth, though tall and slender, was active, as it seemed, and vigorous; and there was somewhat in his voice and mien, even by that imperfect light, which strongly prepossessed the chief in his favour.

"Aga," said the muleteer, as the young man was stepping forward to take the lead, "thou hast been displeased with thy servant; yet, by thine own soul, he desired but to serve thee. We are old travellers, well experienced in these mountains; we know the danger which thou art about to encounter, and would fain have prevented thee from almost certain fate. But what is written must come to pass; in the name of Allah, proceed—thou takest with thee our best assistant, and the ablest and most active guide between Jahjerm and Demawund. But the storm is high and the snow deep, and only He who sends it can guide thee in safety through it. In the name of Allah, Karatoghaur, go on! it is thine own act, and thy blood be on thy head!"

"So be it," replied the youth; "but, a word with thee, Mahomed;" and, after a few moment's earnest conversation with the muleteer, the young man turned to the chief, and said, "Aga, I am thy servant, and ready to do thy bidding; but, before leaving this place, I would respectfully represent that these men are undoubtedly in the right in what they say. The attempt we are to make is one of great hazard; and, spite of thy servant's best efforts, we may fail."

"For that I am prepared, youth; let that suffice," replied the chief, with some impatience.

"It is well, Aga. It remains then, to take the best precautions in our power, and leave the rest to Allah; and now, let thy servant explain the way in which he proposes to proceed. The proper road winds along in that ravine which opens before us, and would lead us gradually, and without much toil, to the top of the Geddook; but it is now impracticable, for the Aga will soon see that the snow in the hollow is more than thirty gez deep. The only way left is, to take the sides and tops of the mountains, where the wind blows strong and the snow cannot lie. Along these we must make our way; hard work it will be, no doubt, in the teeth of such a blast, and there are some fearful spots. But what of that? the Aga requires it; and for the rest, what is written, must be—"

"Afereen, Batchah! well said, let us then depart. It will not be the first mountain-side I have climbed by night, though by the soul of my father, it is not just the weather or the time to choose; but on, on in the name of Allah."

"If the karatoghaur goes with the Aga, I will go too," said the village guide, who had been

watching all that passed with a somewhat sullen aspect; "dog or lion, I will not see him take the hill on such a service, and leave him in the lurch;" and he too, once more, arranged his cloak and tightened his girdle, and stood forth with the other.

"Hah, Barikillah! this sounds better!" said the Khan, "the weather is improving, thank heaven! and now no fear of our success, Bismillah!"

Fierce blew the blast, and thick flew the snow-flakes in the faces of the travellers as they left the shelter of the rock, nor could the stoutest of them repress an involuntary shudder of reluctance, as he turned from the cheerful glimmer of the fire, whose embers caught by the driving gale, threw flashes of fitful radiance across the whitened waste, to face the dim, cold atmosphere beyond, thick with icy haze and blinding drift; but the spirit of the chief was resolved, and his attendants had made up their minds to share his fate. Before the little party had advanced a hundred yards, they were stopped by a snow-wreath which stretched right across the valley barring up all advance; but the young guide casting a single glance of scrutiny around,

without a moment's hesitation, struck right up the left hand height, and gained a ridge from which the snow had evidently been carried off by the blast, to increase the mass below.

And now began an arduous task for the horses. The foot-men active and practised in the work, shot nimbly up the ascent; but the horses, though they made good their way, snorted and blew as they scrambled up the difficult ground, their riders holding on by their manes. Sometimes their footing was the bare soil, thinly sprinkled with dry weeds, which afforded a tolerable hold; at others, the loose stones of the mountain-side gave way under their feet, and the labouring animals slid back nearly as fast as they advanced, while they slipped or stumbled occasionally upon slabs of rough bare rock, which the powdering of snow just hid sufficiently to render dangerous to the smooth-shod hoofs of the horses.

This desperate burst continued for full twenty minutes, when seeing that the ascent rather increased than diminished in asperity, the chief called aloud to the youth who was leading, and desired him to halt for a moment that the horses might draw breath before going further. "For,

by the head of Allee," added he, "this ascent would try the wind of Bourrâk himself."

"True, Aga," responded Allee Beg, with a groan; "not even the blessed mule of the Vicar of Allah could stand such work long; as for my yaboo, wullah! he is all but gone already; the horse of the Presence itself will scarcely hold out for another half hour. Ai vahi! ai vahi! what a night of judgement!—what an unblest mountain!"

"Ay," growled the village guide, "all this I warned you of, but you would not listen; now you have caught it, and our bones will bleach under the snow this night; we have worse than this before us."

"Silence, evil-tongued wretch!" said the youth; "is this your aid, shameless? silence, and think rather of helping, than annoying the Aga. Courage, my lord! heed not that raven; this, after all, *is* the worst of it,—the most difficult, at least; but, less or more, by Allah's might we shall get through; and let us push on while we can, for every fresh snow-flake adds to our labour."

"Bismillah, lad!—proceed; for on I must go, and in you, for the present, lies my trust; bring us through, and name your own reward."

In fact, as the youth had said, after another severe burst, they appeared to have gained the summit of some height, for the ground became less steep; but the chief observed through the gloom, that a wall of dark rocks rose close upon his left, while to the right he could discern nothing but a black abyss, into which the still driving snow descended, preventing the eye from penetrating to any distance.

It was a dreary prospect, but it soon became still more confined; for a furious blast, right in their faces, brought with it such a blinding cloud of drift, that the chief could now see nothing, except the shadowy figure of his guide wading forward through the unbroken snow. In a few minutes he stopped short, and, as the Khan came up, said, "Softly, Aga, here; move slowly and carefully in my traces, and beware of false steps, for the path gets narrow here and the snow is deep, and the descent on our right is very precipitous."

In truth, the horses themselves seemed instinctively to know the danger, for they betrayed every symptom of alarm, and, as the blast drove in their faces, they cowered and leaned towards the rock, snorting and blowing, until at length the chief's horse stood still, setting forward its

fore feet in the attitude of resistance, and drawing back upon its haunches, as if expressing its resolution to proceed no further.

"Strike him not, Aga, strike him not!" exclaimed the guide hastily, and running to the animal's head. "It is a bad step, and the horse, mashallah! knows it well; be pleased to let me lead him for a few paces; the path gets better then."

"By the soul of my father! boy, thou sayest true; the road is a villanous one; could we not have kept the crest, or taken the other side of this unsainted rock? Wullah! the beasts would need wings as well as legs here."

"Impossible, Aga, on my head be it! the crest of this ridge is like a saw, and there is no path whatever leading round it. Three hundred gez below us, in the valley on our right, runs the summer path, buried to half that depth in snow, and, wullah billah! there is no other path than this besides; but the summit of the pass is scarce half a fursuck distant now; let us push on."

"Proceed, then," replied the chief; "be it as you say;" and the guide, walking by the horse's head, encouraged and led it carefully by the bridle over the worst and narrowest steps, until,

after a while, the path widened, and the space between rock and precipice became so broad as to remove all cause of alarm on that account. But, just as the chief was congratulating himself on having escaped a peril which had made his flesh creep on his bones, he started at hearing a cry in the rear, and the young guide sprang back to learn the cause. He found the village guide employed in setting on his legs Allee Beg, after pulling him out of the snow that covered the brink of the path; but his horse had disappeared, and he learned that the creature, exhausted or bewildered, had missed its footing in the narrowest spot, striking its foot against a stone under the snow, and unable, after a violent effort, to recover itself, had rolled down the deep declivity. Fortunately for its rider, its struggle to regain its footing had given him time to disengage his feet and throw himself forward; the village guide, too, had seized hold of the bridle, which, though it broke short in his hand, had checked the animal's fall for a few moments, and thereby aided the rider's effort to free himself. Thus he had lighted on the soft snow, which arrested his further fall, and from which the guide was able to extricate him, while the unfortunate

horse rolled floundering and crashing down, far beyond the reach of vision.

"Allah-il-Allah! there goes the brown yaboo!" was the first exclamation of Allee Beg, as he shook himself out of the snow crust in which he was enveloped as with a garment; "there is just so much goods burnt. God grant we find not a winding-sheet of the same stuff, every one of us, before day breaks! Good; we must now try what can be done on foot."

"Ay," said the guide, "and by your own head! in such paths, you are far better on your own feet than on those of a beast, especially one that was done up before we left the katurjee's stone. Bismillah! take heart, Aga, and come on, we are close to the pass."

"Ay, Batchah," replied the dismounted man, "it is well for you who have legs, that from childhood, no doubt, have done little else than make their way over these mountains, to talk in that fashion. My beard is somewhat longer and whiter than yours, and my limbs rather stiffer, I suspect; but after all, there is nothing for it, as you say, but to take heart and push on; so in the name of Allah, forward!"

So having reported the accident which had

befallen the unfortunate yaboo to their master, who could but utter a few words of encouragement to his followers, the party continued their way along the remainder of the narrow ledge, and soon emerged upon a broad mountain-side, leaving the declivity considerably to their right, while the rocks receded to the left. The snow, however, increased in depth; and while they toiled through it slowly they reached a hollow, probably the bed of some inconsiderable stream.

At this instant the moon appeared, for a space, through the dark and fast flying clouds, giving the first glimpse of hope that the storm might be breaking, and casting her watery light upon a white unbroken expanse bounded by dim and frowning, but equally snow-clad peaks.

"Behold the pass!" said the young guide, pointing to a deep cleft that could just be discerned between two gigantic crags.

"Ay, if we could but reach it!" groaned Allee Beg, as he painfully drew one leg after the other from the tough snow.

The chief said nothing; and before another remark could be made, the sky closed. The moon was shrouded; the drift flew; and all was dark again.

The depth of snow increased as they proceeded; that which was fresh fallen yielding with ease to the pressure of the travellers' feet, while that which was old and lay beneath in a hard crust, would frequently give way and imbed them deeply in its more tenacious substance. Several times had the khan been dismounted by the sinking of his horse over saddle-flaps, and with difficulty extricated by the united efforts of the party. At length the young guide observing the increasing fatigue and failing powers of the party, requested the chief to halt and draw breath for a little, while he should go forward and make sure of the path.

"In that hollow," said he, "the snow lies still deeper than here, because it has not been carried off by the wind, and much has fallen this night; but as we cannot avoid it, we must look for the hardest track. Once across this spot, the rest will be easy work."

A few minutes of cessation from their constant efforts, were, indeed, most welcome to all; but they were not long in discovering that movement, however painful, was necessary to the retention of life; for such was the influence of the freezing blast that it produced intolerable pain, followed

by that dangerous numbness which is the precursor of fatal torpidity ; and the return of the guide from his exploration was scarcely less acceptable than had been the halt occasioned by his absence. He said nothing, however, but took the khan's rein and led his horse step by step along what certainly proved to be a hardened track, and which continued to the bottom of the hollow. There the young man halted.

"This," said he, "is a bad bit ; if we can but pass it we shall do ; but we have only one means of getting the horse across it, and that we must try."

Divesting himself of his own cloak, he called on each of the others to do the same. "Now beat down a path here," said he, "and harden it as much as we can."

The whole party accordingly set vigorously to work and trod down a path for some thirty or forty yards across a space which was obviously swampy beneath the snow. After which the guide spread the cloaks upon it, and the horse passed over them without sinking or pressing this artificial covering more than fetlock deep ; while by removing those behind to the front as the animal advanced he was safely ferried over the dangerous spot.

"Barikillah! this is well!" exclaimed the Khan.

"Ay, thanks be to Allah! we shall now do well," responded the young man, as each resumed his cloak, and they continued their way.

But in a very short while after, Allee Beg came to a standstill, and declared himself unable to move another step. The guide tried to cheer him, and by dint of dragging and lifting by the arms, he did get on a few paces, when the chief's horse, which had hitherto contrived to keep the hard track discovered by the guide, no doubt that of some caravan obliterared by the drift, unluckily swerved, and in attempting to recover its footing, plunged over into the soft snow, where floundering for a few moments, it sunk entirely out of sight, and, totally exhausted, at length lay still.

This was a most unlucky chance; for one of the party being quite disabled, to extricate the fallen animal proved beyond the power of the rest. Time was fast flying; no progress was made by their strongest efforts; and the situation of the whole party became critical. At length the young man spoke.

"This will never do, Aga; we must leave the horse where he is, with your servant, who is

unable to keep up. This guide shall stay with them, and no fear of their lives, for with their own cloaks and mine, which I will leave with them, and lying beside the beast in that hole, they will be safe from cold until help can be sent to them. We will push forwards, and should we not even be able to cross the pass and reach the village, there is a shelter known to me, where you, Aga, can remain while I return to help our friends."

To this proposition, no objection could be offered. The reckless despondency of total exhaustion rendered the arrangement a relief, rather than a cause of terror to Allee Beg, whose faculties were deadened by suffering, while the chief saw no remedy; and the village guide, to whom such incidents were far from uncommon, acquiesced in what he could not help, and for which he anticipated a handsome reward. Accordingly, the chief, preceded by his young guide, and attended by Jan Koolee, recommenced their progress towards the pass; but his dress and accoutrements were far less fitted for exertion on foot than for protecting him from cold on horseback. Although he had left his sheepskin cloak with his disabled servant, his heavy boots and riding

shulwars were a load that dragged him back at every step; and they had not proceeded above half a mile, when he also evinced decided symptoms of distress.

"Stop, stop!" at length he gasped; "God knows—this accursed Geddook! Batchah!—thou art a good youth, and hast done well; but, I believe, I too am knocked up. I never shall reach that infernal pass; and, if I could, where is the pass, and where the village?—It is all over, I fear, with me."

"Oh, courage, my lord!—take heart, take breath," said the guide; "never despair—never think of sticking at the very door. Muster your spirits for one more effort, and you are safe; reach but that cleft, and I promise you rest and a fire. Come, lean on me, Aga—afereen, afereen!—that is it; the higher we get here, the less snow. Bismillah!—bear up; behold that dark lump yonder, which looks black in the snow."

"No, boy, no—it is all over with me—your good will is vain. This sickness at my heart—this trembling of my limbs—Allah-il-ullah!—go—save thyself; as for me, I am gone."

"Never, Aga, never!—what, can we not make out two hundred paces? We shall do it,—by

your own head we shall !—if I carry you on my back, — take heart, take heart. But, see ! — Allah ! Allah ! — travellers already in the cave. Alhumdulillah ! — this is luck. Come, Aga, courage—there is help at hand ; see, yonder," and, as he looked towards the spot pointed out by the guide, the Khan became aware of a light, which burned brightly in the still driving gale. The effect of this sight was instantaneous. Hope revived in his heart, and with it came strength to his limbs. " Praise be to Allah !" said he ; " this is good fortune ; oh, my happy star ! why did I doubt thy influence ? On, Batchah, on !—all is right now ;" and on he pressed with so much vigour, that they soon reached the foot of the immediate ascent to the spot whither they were bound. But, scarce had they begun to mount the remaining space, when the guide exclaimed " Penah-bur-Khodah ! is it he ?" and the chief, raising his eyes at the words, and directing them upwards, discovered that the light which from a distance had seemed to proceed from the mouth of the cavern was, in fact, shed from a torch in the hand of a figure, which certainly wore no very inviting appearance.

From the slightness of its limbs, it might

have been a youth, but its stature was that of a full-grown man ; who, with one long lean arm bore the torch on high, while the other was occupied in trying to prevent the wind from stripping from his person the rude sheepskin garment which was his only covering, and which, in ordinary times, enveloped him from head to foot ; but now, blown forth from his limbs, left them bare in all their gauntness. The head, of extraordinary size, was bent forward, as searching into the obscure atmosphere beneath ; while there streamed from it in wild disorder a multitude of long, dark, elf locks, which would have quite hid the features, had distance and position admitted of their being discerned. Yet, even thus concealed, there was something in the aspect of the creature which bespoke an unnatural deformity, calculated to startle the beholder.

"Allah!" exclaimed the chief, "what imp of the devil is this? but Jin or Ghôl, be he what he may, we shall soon know, for out of the shelter thou speakest of, he shall not keep me. So Bismillah irruhman irruheem!" and with these words, springing forward once more, he soon gained the spot where the elf-like being had stood. There, however, he stood no longer:

for, slipping backwards as the traveller advanced, he had retreated towards an opening in the rock behind him, from which glowed the light of a fire; here, halting for a moment, he beckoned them to follow, and then promptly disappeared.

The chief unhesitatingly complied; and, accompanied by his guide and attendant, in another moment found himself in a cavern formed in the rock, the interior of which was illuminated by a glowing fire. The sudden transition thus made from the darkness and howling of the storm without, to the glare and warmth, and stillness of the cave, confounded the chief's senses; and for some moments prevented him from discerning any object within. But as, after shaking off the snow which had adhered thickly to his person, and shrouding his eyes with his hand, he approached towards the fire with the salute of peace; he was surprised at seeing no one. He stopped, and gazed around; and his eyes after some time, serving him better, lighted on a single form which half wreathed in the smoke that curled round the cavern, might have passed for that of a spirit. In another moment it advanced; and he heard a voice, strange even from its peculiar sweetness, pronounce these words: —

"Let the Eagle of his race approach—let him warm his chilled limbs, and refresh his failing strength."

"In the name of Allah!" replied the chief, "who art thou, and what dost thou know of me?"

"Thy friend—let that suffice; that I know thee, thou seest. Question not, but enjoy what Allah sends thee."

"By my soul thou art right! be thou who thou mayest; yet it is strange. How camest *thou* here. How knowest thou of *my* coming? La-illah-il-ullah! art thou of the race of Adam, or of Jinnestan?" added he with yet more wonder, as he saw that the being who addressed him wore female garments, and marked her singular and impressive aspect. Tall and commanding, her form was shrouded in dark drapery, which closely wrapped around the head, yet leaving the face uncovered, flowed over the shoulders and descended nearly to the ground. But it was the countenance thus left unveiled, and exposed to the full blaze of the fire, which chiefly drew the Khan's attention. Of dark complexion and regular, though emaciated features, the hollow cheeks and haggard lines that now furrowed the brow, had not

been able to destroy the traces of former beauty, nor to efface the expression of peculiar feeling which still animated it. Yet it was the strange and startling character of the deep-set eyes that formed its most striking, if not its most pleasing feature. Close set under their speaking brows, they sparkled with almost appalling lustre; nor was it at once, or until the gazer had recovered from the first effect of their piercing brilliancy, that he could trace its source to their peculiar formation, and discover that round the circle of each jet black pupil was drawn a ring of sparkling white. Thus the chief, though conscious of their power, did not at the moment make this discovery. He only caught the wild, almost unearthly expression, increased by the sable elf-locks that had escaped from under her head-gear, and saw the long lean arm raised high to give emphasis to her speech, while the dark robes so loose and flowing, seemed as if they were ready to melt into the vapours with which she was surrounded.

"Speakest thou, too, as one of the feeble?" demanded the female, in reply to his hurried question. "But be satisfied a child of Adam, a worm of clay addresses thee,—a servant of the

Most High, sent by *Him* to minister to thy wants. Refuse not His bounty though sent by an unworthy messenger."

"May God forbid! in His name I accept it. But hearken; there are others near who need help more than I do; art thou alone, or canst thou also send aid to them?"

"Be satisfied; aid shall be sent."

"And I am ready," said the guide, "to lead the way; rest assured that thy servants will soon be here in safety, for she whom Allah has sent to aid thee, is well able to succour others also."

"Thou knowest her then, youth?" said the Khan interrogatively, and fixing a keen regard on his face.

"Aga, I do. She is both trustworthy and powerful;" and stepping forward he addressed the female in terms expressive of deep respect, but which satisfied the Khan that he knew well to whom he spoke. A signal then brought to her side a creature whom the Khan recognized at once as the torch-bearer, but whose appearance gained nothing by a closer inspection; and he shuddered as he surveyed the wild and savage lineaments of his countenance, illuminated as they were by eyes so closely resembling those of

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the female, as to betoken near kindred, yet filled with an almost demoniac lustre.

At an order from the female, conveyed by means which the chief could not understand, this imp-like being wrapped his sheepskin mantle round him, and issued from the cavern, beckoning with a fantastic motion to the guide to follow.

"Is that thy helpmate?" demanded the chief, whose look of wonder had scarcely been turned from the creature from the moment of his entrance; "canst thou put trust in such an ally?"

"Fear not, my lord," replied the youth, "your servant trusts in those who now are aiding us because he knows their power. Be pleased to take your rest, and be satisfied that long before dawn both horse and man, please God, shall be safe in this place, from whence with morning's light you may pursue your journey at pleasure."

"Afereen, youth!" replied the chief, I will trust to thy counsel, and receive thy comfort. By my soul! if thou dost perform what thou hast said, thou wilt merit all that I can do to reward thee."

The chief and his mysterious hostess being thus left alone, the former addressed her at once

with frankness. "And now, mother, I am at thy disposal—Bismillah! in the name of God, bestow thine hospitality."

Without reply, the female addressed herself to work; and, removing a rude cooking vessel from the ashes in which it had been placed, set its contents before her guest, who found them of so savoury a nature, that he rapidly discussed an ample portion of them. A gourdful of cool water served to quench his thirst, nor was there wanting a rude water-pipe to soothe and exhilarate his spirits. During the time he was thus employed, his hostess spread a heap of grass or weeds on one side; and, throwing over it a coarse covering, as soon as the pipe was exhausted, made a sign that his bed was prepared. More than once did he address her with questions, but she preserved a resolute silence; and the chief, whose curiosity had for the time given way to fatigue, and the soporific effects of warmth and a comfortable meal, quietly took his place on the couch prepared for him, and fell into the deep sleep of weariness.

CHAPTER II.

THE FAKEEREH.

The repose of the Khan had continued uninterrupted and profound; for, when he awoke, and saw the light of a brilliant morning streaming in at the entrance of the cavern, it required some moments' reflection to remind him of where he was. Rousing himself, however, and looking round him, his eye fell upon the recumbent persons of three men; and scarcely had he recognized them as those of his servant and the guides, when the hinneying of a horse in another quarter gave token that his charger had also been rescued from its cold berth, and was safely restored to him. His attention was next directed to discover the authors of this good deed, but no one, save his sleeping attendants, were to be seen within the cavern, which now was tolerably well lighted up by the slanting rays of the sun.

Anxious to find them, or to solve the mystery of their disappearance, yet reluctant to disturb those whose title to repose had been earned by a toil far severer than any he had suffered, he rose noiselessly from his couch, and first giving a look to his horse, in whose nose-bag some remains of barley and chopped straw proved that his wants had not been neglected, he repaired to the entrance of the cavern to see whether any traces could be detected of those he had lost sight of within. No living creature was to be seen; yet, on emerging from the cavern into the open air, his eyes were greeted with a prospect calculated to touch the most insensible heart, and draw forth admiration and wonder. The storm had ceased, and not a breath of air now moved the light and powdery snow that lay thick and unbroken over the vast mountainous track which stretched around in every imaginable variety of peak, and ridge, and shapeless mass. The cavern occupied a ledge on the shoulder of one of the crags which formed the buttresses of the pass. It lay amongst the ruins of a huge rocky mass, which still rose behind it, and from which they had originally fallen in such a manner as to form a chamber of considerable

space and height; and so firmly had the walls and roof of this structure of accident become jammed together by the superincumbent débris, that the security of its shelter was as perfect as if framed by the most cunning art; while the soil that had been washed down, and gradually accumulated above its roof, had rendered it almost perfectly water-tight. From its frequently giving shelter to shepherds, who in summer led their flocks and herds to the luxuriant pasture of this part of the Shah-koh, it had become known as the Ghaur-e-chuppun, or shepherd's cave; and many a storm-pressed and benighted traveller had by its rough but friendly walls been saved from otherwise inevitable destruction.

From the terrace in front of this cavern, which commanded both sides of the pass, the chief looked down on one side over the country he had toiled through on the preceding night. A large hollow beneath his feet sunk into a deep ravine, from the opposite side of which sprang up a vast mountain, furrowed in its turn by many a cleft, each of which conveyed its tribute of waters to the stream at its feet. The other side of the hollow was bounded by an irregular congregation of heights, beyond which rose other and grander

peaks, while the vista between disclosed a grey and shadowy tract, with here and there a point or insulated mass rising dubiously among it, all dim and hazy in the rays of the eastern sun. This was the low country east of Asterábad, where sea and plain, the Caspian and the low rich lands of Gourgaun, were blended together in undistinguishable distance.

On the other side of the pass the view was more bounded, for peaks rose above peaks and ridge beyond ridge, with many a valley and hollow between, and all glitteringly white, save where those more distant were spotted with the dark bushes of the *kaudje* or red cedar tree, which is thinly scattered over all this range of mountains. It was in truth a glorious spectacle—the white peaks rose sharp against the deep blue sky, all smiling in the sunshine, like the ocean in a calm, as if death had never made his home in their cold and ghastly bosoms. The chief stood gazing for a while as if entranced with the sublimity of the scene ; then shuddering, probably at the recollection of his late narrow escape, he turned, and again entering the cavern, found that his youthful guide had also risen from sleep, and was busily looking after his charger.

"Afereen, Batchah! Afereen!" said he, addressing the young man, "thou art a careful fellow, and by my soul thou appearest to understand the handling of a good horse—ay, that is the way—rub down that off-leg a little; the fetlock seems swelled, and no wonder it should have got some strain in that unblest hole he fell into. Hah Barikillah! that is it; thou art as good groom as guide, and, by the head of Allee, if thou seekest service thou shalt not lack a master. What sayest thou, hah? Who art thou, youth?"

"Thy servant is nothing; a Toorkoman lad from the Attruck, who has lived among horses, and who knows something of these border countries."

"A Toorkoman, thou! By the head of Allee, impossible. No Toorkoman dam ever foaled such a colt. These eyes and that nose never came from Toorkoman sire. Wert thou not rather a captive in their hands?"

"That might be so, Aga; vague recollections will sometimes rise in my mind of some former state before I lived in a Toorkoman camp."

"Ay, my head upon it, boy, thou art Toork, and not Toorkoman; but be thou what thou mayest, thou didst a job last night which few

could have performed: and to bring on these laggers, too, so cleverly—how didst thou manage it after all? I thought I had seen the last of my poor Arab Hogloo."

"The storm was abating, Aga, when we left the cave, and I had able help; your servant and the guide, too, were better off than we thought for; the aid we brought gave them courage. Even your lordship felt that hope revived inspires fresh vigour."

"And that is true, boy; but what was that aid—not surely that strange being with whom you left the cave?"

"He it was, Aga, and none else; but he was sufficient, as you have seen."

"Indeed, it so appears—a wonderful creature he seems to be. But who is he? You have met with him before?"

"Ay, Aga, I have met with him; but as for who he is, wullah! I cannot tell."

"Indeed—strange enough that. Is he not the child of that woman who received us here last night?"

"It is so believed, Aga; but no one knows the truth, nor whence they come, or who they are."

"Singular enough; you know her also well; you have met with her, too, before, it appears?"

"Ay, Aga, often."

"And where, boy?"

"In our obah, in the mountains on the Attruck's banks, in Gourgaun, in many parts of these border countries; but never so far from the plains before. At one time she was much in our obah, and seldom did many weeks pass without my seeing her, for she loved the Alachick of Oghuz Aga: she had cause to do so; but there I have not been of late, nor have I seen her for months until last night."

"And the boy? Does he constantly attend her?"

"Boy?" repeated the young man shaking his head emphatically; "no, Aga, he is seldom seen, but cannot, as it would seem, be ever far distant from her, for I have known him appear on a sudden, and then she would immediately depart along with him."

"And by what name or appellation is she known, or what is her occupation?"

"In our camp, Aga, she was called the Fakeereh. As for her occupation, what shall I represent?

Many were the reports that prevailed regarding her, but no one knew the truth. Some said that she was skilled in many wonderful arts ; and it is certain that no *munajem* could prescribe a fortunate hour, or read the stars, as she could when she would ; but others averred,"—and here he lowered his voice,—" that she had obtained power over the Jins ; that she possesses the great talisman, and can discover the hidden treasures of the earth. Those who disliked her reviled her for a witch, and protested that she practised *jadoo geeree* (magic). God knows the truth ! To me she was always kind, and nothing but good did I ever receive, or know to have been received at her hand. May Alla forgive her sins ! She has predicted fortune for me, and declared that I was born to wealth and honour. What can I tell ?"

" A wonderful tale, boy !—and what can have become of her now ? Why has she left us so suddenly ? I owe her many acknowledgments for her worthy and opportune service. She appeared to know me, too, — ay, and called herself my friend ; may her life be prosperous ! Strange ! I would fain see her again."

" That she has left this place is clear, Aga ; but how, or when, who can tell ? This is her wonted

way; before you had waked this morning, I knew that she was no longer here."

"An extraordinary creature! a strange adventure, truly. But, come, it is past, and the day advances; Taushkoon is far distant; rouse the people, boy, and make ready my horse; Allah only knows whether the poor animal will ever get clear of these villanous mountains."

"Do not fear it, my lord. The way now is all descent, and the snow lies less upon this side the hill. You will meet with caravans, too, inshallah! and their track will make the path easy; there is no booraun to-day, praise be to God!"

The men were now roused, and the horse being saddled received a few handfuls of corn found in a corner, the remainder, no doubt, of what had been provided by their singular hostess; and a further search discovered some ready-cooked victuals, destined, probably, for their morning's meal. Blowing into life the embers of the fire which had been kept up till late on the preceding night, the youth warmed the food, and made ready a rude mountain pipe; and the chief, refreshed with food and rest, prepared once more to mount his steed; but he stopped on observing his young guide preparing to take leave. "How is this,

Batchah ?" said he. "Dost thou not mean to accompany us? art thou already weary of serving us? Dost thou reject my offer of employment?"

"God forbid, Aga!" replied the young man, with a modest energy. "Willingly would I continue to perform the little service I can render to your lordship, and still more would I desire to follow so kind and gallant a leader; but my comrades require my assistance, and will expect me—I must return." Yet his lingering step and kindling eye, as he stood gazing on the person of the chief, betrayed how much at variance were his wishes and what he deemed his duty.

"Pshah, youth!" replied the former. "What callest thou thy duty? Are there not *cherwadars* and yaboos enough in Mazunderan and Asterabad to follow lead, without thy adding to the string! Up with thee, man! Thy comrades will find a fitter mate. Do thou complete thy work, and guide me through these hills,—though by the death of my father I should know the way from hence as well as thou. Cross not the path of thy happy star while it is in the humour to rise—there are few in thy station

who would hesitate in accepting the proffered favour of Jaaffer Koolee Khan."

"Allah!" exclaimed the youth, as that name, so well known and beloved throughout all Mazunderan and its bordering districts, fell upon his ear. "Is it truly thus? Well done, then, my good star. My head is indeed exalted, if thou hast brought it beneath the shadow of the noble Jaaffer Koolee Khan! Thy servant is less than the least, but he is in your lordship's hand. May Allah grant him a continuance of favour in your sight!"

"Hoh—this is as it should be, youth; proceed but as thou hast begun, and doubt not of favour and advancement. Inshallah! yon strange friend of thine will prove a true prophetess. Bismillah! let us now push on, for by my own life we have work enough before us."

So saying the Khan putting foot in stirrup sprang into the saddle, and after gazing about him for a few moments, as if to fix the spot in his memory, followed his new attendant, who took the lead, down the slope on the south side of the pass. This being the windward side, was far more clear of snow, as all that had freshly fallen had been carried off by the storm to the

other side of the crest. Their progress, therefore, was greatly more rapid; and though they did occasionally flounder into unseen hollows, the day was all before them, and the fresh spirits which a bright and cheerful morning after a good night's rest is sure to give, even in these snowy wastes, carried them manfully through their remaining difficulties. We shall therefore take leave of them for a time, and open another chapter of our tale.

CHAPTER III.

THE DURKHANEH.

THREE days after the incidents related in our last chapter, an equally bright and cheering morning rose upon a very different scene. An amphitheatre of high and picturesque mountains, whose crests shot up in many a varied peak and ridge, half encircled a plain of considerable extent, opening out upon a far more extensive tract of level country, which in its turn was bounded and islanded at various distances by chains or groups of brown or purple hills. The snow which covered all the highlands, and descended nearly to the skirts of the semicircle of mountains, had disappeared from the plain at their foot; in the midst of which might be seen the wall of a considerable city, rising but little above the surface of the surrounding ground. It was marked at regular distances by the projections of

semicircular bastions, which were almost the only objects that gave the slightest character to the mean and shapeless collection of buildings it inclosed, unvaried at that time by either minaret or dome. This city was Zehran, already selected by the successful chief of the Kajar tribe as the capital of that empire for which he was still contending, because it was near the domains of his family, and his other resources, and therefore fittest to be the sovereign's fixed abode.

On the *crenilated* wall and roofs of this city the morning sun, having cleared the bank of clouds that rested on the shoulder of Demawound, and the lofty regions of Feerozekoh, shed a red but brilliant light, and played upon the numerous groups of men and animals which, pent within its circuit during the night, were now passing forth in multitudes from the opened gates, on their way to their daily occupations. But not alone did the peasant with his flocks and herds rejoice in its gladdening ray. It shone upon less peaceful objects than the cultivation and cultivators of the neighbourhood; for on an open space beyond the *Durwaze-u-Dowlut.* or royal gate, might be seen pitched a number of white tents; around and among which the

busy hum of armed men, and the mustering of troops for the morning's duty, gave ample testimony that something was going forward beyond mere ceremonial. And this fact was confirmed by the frequent passage of mounted parties, of officers well attended, and messengers spurring at speed between the *Ark* or citadel, and the camp.

Nor would the impression thus created have been diminished on remarking the alertness, as well as the increased number of the guards on duty at the entrance of the ark itself, and the frequent challenge of these guards to persons whom they judged to have no business within its precincts. The Maidaun, or large court before the royal residence, was also filled with a greater than ordinary number of troops and military figures. There might be seen the men of Larijoon and Arjumund, the trusty and trusted troops of the Kajar family, known by their dark garments, from whence their name of *Karachoghas*. These were gathered in large groups around their officers; but interspersed among them were gayer parties of the gholaums, distinguished not more by their smart riding-gear, their silver mounted carbines, and small round

shields, than by the Kajar cap set knowingly on one side, and their swaggering, dare-devil air.

Chiefs and nobles too, of graver mien might be seen clustering round the august gateway and entering or returning from business within; and gallant coursers having their saddles covered with the beautifully embroidered *zeenposhes*, and held by grooms, or mounted by the Jeloodars while waiting the return of their masters, spangled the court like jewels on a mosaic tablet. Purpose-like, dirt-bespattered couriers came and went like flying darts, and busy officials, guards, nassakchees, yessawuls, heralds, shatirs (or running footmen,) furoshes, and various messengers bustled about among the numerous groups; whilst meerzas and moostôfees, with rolls of papers stuck in their girdles, slouching gait and shuffling step, glided backwards and forwards in quiet contrast to the more dashing mien of the military portion of the assembly,—it was, in short, approaching the hour of the salaam or public audience; and the appearance of the remarkable personage whom every one regarded with fear and reverence, was anxiously expected.

In a small chamber, opening from the passage that led from the first gate of entrance to the

chief court of the palace, sat a group of individuals whose dress and deportment left no doubt of their military calling; while the swords, and shields, and pistols, and war-like accoutrements of all sorts which hung upon the walls, confirmed the fact. This was the quarter of the officers of the *kessek* or guard; and a louder hum of voices, with occasional bursts of merriment proceeding from a larger apartment opposite, proclaimed with no less certainty that there was the kessek-khaneh or guard-room, occupied by a party of the royal gholaums and kessekchees, or guards.

The group in the officers' quarters consisted of about a dozen persons, who, seated according to their recognised rank and condition, upon the felt carpets, spread along the walls of the apartment, conversed together with an earnestness that proved how engrossing was the subject of their discourse. The room was warmed by a bright fire of wood, which roared and crackled in a chimney at the upper end, and each in turn sucked industriously at the calleeoons which were brought in by servants, and passed from hand to hand.

"It is true—by your head it is! rest satisfied of that," said a keen-looking middle-sized man, whose brilliant eyes, and handsome regular fea-

tures were set off by a large black beard. "There is a chupper just come in from Bostam; and depend upon it, there will be work in that quarter before the next moon comes in—What? Mustapha Koolee Khan at the head of three or four thousand wild Mazunderanees and give in without a blow?—impossible."

"You say the truth; he will not give in while he can strike," replied a large, hard-featured person, who occupied a high seat near the fire, and had just emitted a prodigious stream of smoke down his long beard, after taking the pipe from his mouth. "I know something of Mustapha Koolee: he is of the true Toorkee breed; if he had *acul* (judgment) to match his ambition and boldness, he would turn out another Nader on our hands. Thanks to our Aga's good star, such is not the case; and Mustapha will break his own head before long without greatly damaging ours."

"Pardon me, Aga," replied another of the company, a tall gaunt figure, rejoicing in a long nose, and red beard, and eyes tending towards grey; "what you have said regarding Mustapha Koolee is right; but I would represent that he is likely to give more work than you seem to

reckon on ; for he is well known as a brave soldier and a fortunate leader; and he has many friends throughout the low country, both among Kizzilbashes and Toorkomans. These Asterabadees think him a perfect Roostum ; from Balfroosh to Ashruff, there are numbers who wait but a first success to rise in his favour ; and what *he* wants in judgment will be supplied by others who have enough to turn his war-like talents to account. Well did old Allee Murad know his value. Had that cunning fox retained his breath but twelve months longer, where should we have been this day ? By the head of the Prophet ! our Aga's star was high when that *koore-mootshukhus** was taken to the joys of Paradise ! Hussun Koolee Khan was right when he promised us work in that quarter. Well is it that his brother Moorteza has taken his way westward ; but, in truth, Mazunderan could never have held them both."

" No, certainly," replied the second speaker, who was known as Nejeff Koolee Khan, Affshar, " that has been well proved already ; and none knew it better than Moorteza himself, when he

* " Respectable blind gentleman ;" the appellation given by Aga Mahomed Khan to Allee Murad Khan.

left the field to his brother, and walked off to make Hedayut Khan as bad as himself—dust on his head for it! Small were his chance of mercy now, should he fall into our Aga's hands."

"Ay," remarked another of the party, "when state concerns are in question, small regard to persons has our Aga. A brother's blood is no redder than a stranger's when caught in the field as a foe."

"Yes," said Hoossein Koolee Khan, a Kajar and near connection of the family, who had listened to the last two speakers, in rather moody silence, "yes, Kajar blood has never been either grudged or spared; had less been shed, there might now be more friends round the Dur-Khaneh,* and fewer at Bostam; but God is great!"

"Ay, ay, Hoossein Koolee, we know what you are thinking of; but let it rest, man; this is no time for brooding over past misfortunes, or stirring up a sleeping blood-feud. Too many of these have distracted our tribe, and you know that our Aga has nothing more at heart than to bind it once more together like a sheaf of arrows. But what part will Jaafer Koolee Khan take in this affair? You know him well; what will he do?"

"*Che midânum?*— What do I know?" re-

* Gate of the Palace—the Court.

sponded Hoossein Koolee, to whom the turn taken by the conversation seemed by no means pleasing, and who spoke in an uneasy accent.

"Nay, but you are a friend of his,—of one soul, indeed,—more even than a kinsman, and should know his mind. Where is he now?"

"Where he may now be, I cannot tell; but this at least is certain, that Jaaffer Koolee is not the man to turn his back on any friend without a cause; so, if our Aga have given him none, no doubt he may depend on his aid against Mustapha. Jaafer Koolee is full blood to our Aga, and there *is* something in blood, whatever Ismael Beg may think."

"Ay, Aga, no doubt; yet, after all, were Jaaffer Koolee to think differently on the present occasion, would it be the first time he had done so?"

"And if it were not, no doubt Jaaffer Koolee had his reasons. Treat a man as a dog, and he will turn and bite you. Who has been more faithful, more attached, more zealous for the Presence than Jaaffer Koolee, even when our Aga's fortunes were at the lowest. Who was it that saved him from death or blindness, at Balfroosh, when Moorteza and Reza Koolee would have

fain removed such a stumbling-block from their path? Was it not Jaaffer Koolee who prevailed upon — who compelled this very Mustapha, to join him in delivering his Highness from that den of wolves. Wullah! Jaaffer Koolee is a man— a man I say; brave as Roostum, noble-minded, frank, and generous; mashallah! he is the leader for my fancy, and God grant that our master may feel his value, and confide in his honour. On my head be it, he will not repent it. If fortune follow the good and brave, it can never desert Jaaffer Koolee Khan."

"Afereen, Afereen, Hoossein Koolee! well said, mashallah! the Khan is a real nobleman, a true Kajar, and God grant, as thou sayest, that he may still keep on the right side, for loath should I and many more be to draw sword against him."

"Draw sword against *him!*" repeated the other, shaking his head, as he took the calleeoon from the last speaker. "But no fear of that, inshallah! Let our Aga only deal fairly by him, and on my eyes be the issue."

"Doubt not that, doubt not that," said Allee Koolee Beg; "our Aga is prudent, alhumdulillah! wisdom reaches no higher than his, mashallah! he has the power of persuasion; when did he ever

fail with any whom he has once resolved to secure? Allah knows best, but one might think he had a talisman, not only to bring men to his footstool, but to keep them to their duty. Praise be to God, he, after all, is the chief to rule the Iraunees."

"And yet," remarked another in an under tone, "in what lies the charm? surely not in looks, nor in voice—no, nor in manner. What shall we say? is it his liberality—his courage?"

"Hush, hush, comrades!" observed the red-bearded worthy, whose name was Ferij Oolla Khan, an officer of high repute in the opinion of his master; "there is little prudence in speaking too freely of the lion so close to his den. Whatever be the charm, we all feel it, and, inshallah! will be true to him who bears it, or woe be to the traitors. But what may this be?—who comes here?"

As he spoke, a stir was heard at the gate, and forward came a courier covered with mud and dirt, and staggering with weariness, but still making the best of his way towards the guard-house.

"From whence?" demanded Nujjuff Koolee Khan.

"From Sultanieh, in your service, and with letters from Khumsa."

"Bismillah! step up and smoke a calleeoon; tell us what you know; his Highness has not yet come out."

The courier having been helped up the few steps, like a man who feels the consequence which chance has bestowed upon him, sat down, dirt and all, with no little fuss, and having received the calleeoon, drew from it several deep whiffs; he had sufficient discretion, however, not to exhaust the patience of his auditory, and having returned the pipe to the servant, and stroked down his beard, he began:

"I would represent in your service, Agas, that being in attendance on the part of his Highness with the Zabit of Sultanieh, I was sent for, and found with him a Cossid just arrived from Zenjaun. There was much conversation going on, Agas, and I pressed the man hard for news; but he appeared to be a double-accented ass, and nothing could be got out of him. He had brought in the papers which are inclosed in this packet, for his Highness; but all I could learn is, that Allee Khan had summoned his contingent, and has been receiving messengers from the Karagooslies of Hamadan and the Sheghaughees of Miana and Heshtrood. What the object of their mus-

tering may be, did not appear to be known; but there was talk of something going on among the Koords and the Lours. As for Allee Khan, Agas, your worships are better able than I to say whether he is trustworthy or not."

"And is this the way of it, murdeki? is this all you have to tell?"

"By your souls, Agas, it is—there is no more to be told; and, your pardons, I had best be off to the gate of the Anderoon to wait his Highness's orders. Wullah! right glad will your servant be to receive his dismissal, for not a wink of sleep have I had since I mounted at Sultanieh; and I left one horse sticking in the mud at Siadehn."

"It is well, you have leave—begone. Wullah! that ghorumsaug's news are not worth the calleeoon he had. When did we ever hear of Koordistan being quiet, or the Khumsa folk thinking only of their bullocks and ploughs? How should the pot fail to boil with so much heat all around it?"

"Pardon me," said Nujjuff Koolee Khan, "restless as they are, neither Koord nor Toork would dream of stirring at this time of year without cogent reasons, and such movements must

have a deeper source than we see at present; my eyes on it, something is going on near Ispahan. But see, here is another beast of the road. Whence from, *humsheheree?* come up hither and let us have your news—here, hand him the calleeoon."

"Wullah—little have I to tell, Aga: I am from Savah, and my news will scarce gain me the *mujdeh*. Hadjee Allee the Zabit sends his duty, and some fine carpets as *peishcush;* but for troops or provisions, *heech*—nothing."

"Afereen, Hadjee Allee!" said Ferij Oollah Khan; "now, by my own death! I would not fill thy cloak for a thousand tomauns in gold. At how much do you value your head or your eyes that you stake them on such a game? That vile kite smells carrion now; there is something stiring near him, and he is trying to keep quiet till he sees which way the wind will set. Wullah! such work wont go down with our Aga, and that the Hadjee will find to his cost."

"By your head, Khan!" said Nujjuff Koolee Khan, "you have found it; no doubt there is some connection between these Koordish and Khumsa movements and Hadjee Allee's inactivity. Good; it will soon be in the hands of one

who will neither rest nor let others rest until he sees the bottom of it all. But who comes next; this must be a bird of higher flight, to judge by the screaming of the small fowl."

And indeed the sudden hum of voices and exclamations of surprise which, rising from a distance, approached with the rapidity of a train of powder fired, did seem to herald an arrival of more than common importance, and every eye was directed towards the gateway, and every neck was outstretched, as a single figure, travel-stained from head to foot, held on with rapid pace towards the Kessheck Khaneh. But this figure, soiled and *smirched* as it was, with its noble port, its handsome sunburnt countenance beaming with good humour, and exhibiting no symptom of the toil which the dress seemed to betray, was enough, not only to satisfy every eye, but to open every mouth, and the cry of "Jaaffer Koolee Khan! Jaaffer Koolee Khan!" reached the ears of the party we have described, before his person became visible to their eyes.

At the sound of this name, so lately the subject of their discourse, one and all arose and came forward to receive him, while the guards and gholaums with whom he was a special favourite,

turned out even before the order, to salute and do honour to the favourite brother of their sovereign.

"Alhumdulillah! Khoosh gueldee! Khoosh gueldee! Thanks be to Allah! Welcome, welcome my lord! Welcome your Highness! may your footsteps be fortunate; you have brought light to our eyes!" burst from all the officers. "Praise be to Heaven, you have come! Your arrival will bring satisfaction and happiness to his Highness!"

"Ah, friends! prosperity to you all; may your kindness increase; ye are all in health, I hope? Nujjuff Koolee Khan; my brave Ferij Oolah; what—old Alee Koolee Beg, you here, too? may our meeting be fortunate. Hoossein Koolee, dear friend, praise be to God, you are here; hard work we have had to reach you; no matter, we *have* come. Where is his Highness?"

"I would state," replied Hoossein Koolee, after affectionately, yet respectfully, kissing the Khan's hand, "that his Highness has not yet come forth; doubtless when he is informed"—

"Hoh, good; let intimation be made forthwith. And now, friends. A caleeoon—by your souls we require it; not a pipe, nor a morsel of food these sixteen hours, and hard riding, too; come

straight from Cheshmeh Alee, without a halt, by the pass to Dowlutabad ; almost stuck fast in the Gerdunee Aheyoon ; no going by Feeroze-koh ; the snow, Allah knows how many gez deep ! fortunately got hold of a fresh horse at Somnaum ; all my own done up long before ; but, at length, here am I at his Highness's disposal ; so this is a comfort at all events ;" and, taking the well-prepared waterpipe, he began to suck in with avidity its fragrant fumes, as one who has been dying of thirst would drain a vessel of clear cold water.

During this time the officers all preserved a respectful silence ; but as soon as the pipe was exhausted, and the Khan had withdrawn his lips from it with a deep " Alhumdulilla !" Nujjuff Koolee Khan ventured to put some questions respecting his journey, and the nature of his news.

" Why," replied he, " as for the first, comrades, I may tell you that I came straight from Kalposh and Jahjerm, and have scarcely slept since I left the last place to make my way by Shahkoh ; as for my news, there is but little to tell, and that, by your leave, is for his Highness's ear, who, you well know, loves not to be forestalled ; so you will excuse me."

"Well has the Khan spoken," replied his questioner; "God forbid we should forget ourselves and be guilty of disrespect or indiscretion; but rumours are abroad, and we thought"—

"Ay, rumours enough; many a one have I heard since I last took leave of his Highness; among the rest I have learned that we were ourselves termed yaghee;* you may see the truth of rumours. The same is said of Mustapha Koolee; no doubt, please God, it will turn out as ill-founded. But here comes his Highness's messenger to summon me; so pardon me, and Allah have ye all in remembrance!" and, springing from his seat as lightly as if fresh from his couch, he met the Gholaum-peishkhidmut, who had come to usher him to the private apartments of his brother, and soon disappeared through the gateway leading thereto.

* Rebellious.

CHAPTER IV.

THE KHELWUT.

In an apartment of small dimensions, and plainly, though comfortably, furnished according to the fashion of the country, and beside a blazing fire of wood, sat a personage who, at first sight, might have been taken for a youth, so slight was his figure and such parts of his limbs as were visible, and so small his beardless countenance. But a more attentive glance would have satisfied the beholder that the high expanding forehead, corrugated by lines of deep thought, and the brows strongly knit over eyes contracted by habitual suspicion, yet bright and restless, glancing at every object, but seldom remaining fixed on any, belonged to a riper age. The general cast of the countenance was grave and anxious, though at times lit up with a gleam of fiercer expression. The mould of the features was noble, and the

nose in particular, though somewhat too long, was straight and well shaped; but doubts might have been entertained as to the sex of the being to whom these attributes pertained, for the thin upper lip was destitute of mustachios, nor was a symptom of beard to be discovered on the hollow cheeks or long oval chin, from under which the skin hung in wrinkles over the shrivelled neck. Yet would the beholder have paused in pronouncing the person to be a female, for there was a tone of resolute decision upon the pale brow, an air of mental strength and firmness in the outline of the lower jaw, and a capacity in the skull, seldom to be found, save in the male sex. Nor were these delusive tokens; for he whom we have thus attempted to present to our readers was no other than the celebrated Aga Mahomed Khan, then not quite forty-four years of age, and unquestionably the ablest as he was the most remarkable man of his age and country at this time, ruler only of the northern provinces, but afterwards undisputed sovereign of the Persian empire.

He was habited in a loose *chogha*, or cloak of brown cloth, lined with fur, rather the worse for wear, which enveloped him from shoulder to foot, concealing all his other habiliments, save when

the thrusting forth of an arm displayed an equally shabby sleeve and vest of dark-coloured cotton stuff. His head was covered with a cap of black velvet embroidered with gold, a good deal tarnished. Before him, on the thick felt carpet on which he sat, was placed his *cullumdaun*, or writing-case, with a roll of paper and several written notes; beside it, on a square piece of padded silk, lay an old-fashioned watch in a shagreen case; and beyond these, ready for use, was placed his gold-mounted scymetar, its curved blade encircling, and guarding, as it were, the other and yet more powerful implements; an arrangement, which though probably fortuitous, afforded an apt type of the chief's own mind, relying as it did rather on policy and foresight than force—on the head and the pen rather than the hand and sword, and regarding the latter but as subsidiary to the former, —a means of resort only when these had failed, but then, indeed, to be used with unsparing severity.

The only other person in the apartment was a man of middle size, and rather slender frame, whose features were expressive at once of grave sagacity and deep respect. This was Meerza Sheffeah, at that time the principal and confidential minister of state. He wore a fur-lined robe,

greatly superior in appearance and value to that which enveloped his master, and, even at this early hour, the shawl-wound cap, and red stockings used by the nobles of Persia when in attendance on their sovereign: for, so jealous in matters of respect was the Khan, and so tenacious of ceremony, that, though careless often to slovenliness of his own appearance, he suffered no one to approach his presence without due attention to all observances.

The apartment itself might have been regarded as somewhat of an index to its owner's mind. It was, as we have remarked, furnished with sufficient attention to comfort, but with perfect plainness. The walls, finished above the surface with white stucco work, were ornamented beneath it with a pattern of flowers upon a white and azure ground, and the single-pointed window was glazed with painted glass, arranged in compartments of beautiful figures, through which the rising sun threw a many-tinted light upon the carpet. But that carpet, though of the softest and closest texture that the looms of Herât could produce, displayed no gorgeous colours, and the strips of felt which were laid along the sides of the room, though of the finest fabric of Tuft, were as plain in their hue as

the wool of which they were formed. The niches in the walls contained one or two pieces of china, and a few handsomely-bound books; and a curtain of Indian chintz, wadded with cotton, hung before each doorway, excluding all cold from this *khelwut*, which was the private closet of Aga Mahomed Khan.

It seemed that Meerza Sheffea had just made his appearance; and the bundle of papers he held in his hand, in addition to several rolls stuck in his girdle, betokened this to be no mere visit of ceremony, but an audience of real business.

"Well, what news, Meerza?" demanded the monarch, in the harsh, cracked voice which he owed to his misfortune; "what arrivals?"

"Few, Centre of the Universe," replied the Meerza, after tendering the deep obeisance always paid to Persian sovereigns,—"none of much importance as yet; but others are looked for every hour: the state of the roads delays the chuppers. Here is a letter from Meerza Ibrahim Larijoonee, about the men who ought to have been here a week ago. Their clothing and equipment has not yet been furnished, but he promises—"

"*Be jehannum* with his promises!" exclaimed the chief; "his promises are like his own kher-

boozas*—plenty of them, but little worth ; but he shall be reckoned with, and by another account than he expects.—Nothing from Asterabad or Hezarjereeb ?"

" Nothing certain from Asterabad, your Highness ; but a troop of toffunchees have come up from Feerozekoh, almost disabled by cold : some have lost feet or hands. The snow is so heavy in the mountains, they say, that caravans cannot pass from the low country."

" Pshah !—Feerozekoh is at our door, all easy work ; the news we desire is from a distance — Not a word from Ispahan ?"

" Nothing new, Shadow of the Universe,—nothing since we heard of Ismael Khan having been sent into Louristan by his uncle."

" Barikillah ! Meerza, a worthy news-merchant art thou ; thou would'st scarcely live by the trade. Here have we received notice that Ismael had turned traitor on his own account,—but with small profit, it seems, for the troops dispersed at the uncle's approach, and he has fled to the Wali. A wonderful family, these unsainted Zends ! nothing to be heard of amongst them but treachery and murder, blind-

* Melons.

ing and strangling, rebellion and fighting. — Strange! Wulla! they are not the only fools who play that losing game. Well, but from Khumsa and Miskeen, hah? — there, there is a point to be guarded. What may Allee Khan be about?"

"By the latest accounts, Centre of the Universe, Allee Khan was quiet at Zenjaun; no doubt, however, he keeps one eye turned to Ghilan, and the other to Koordistan. But the Eeliaut of Casveen are in our hand and will keep him in check; we can be sure of four or five thousand of them at a call. Would to Allah, your Highness could depend as securely on Ferraghoon, Austioon, and the central districts!"

"Ay, Meerza, would to God we could! The Zend poison is too near them; we must find them a Hakeem. The ghorumsaugs would play us a trick if they dared; but, Inshallah! a good day will come.—Hah! who is there?" demanded he, raising his voice as his ear caught a signal at the door of the antechamber, — "Gholaum Allee?"

The door was heard to open, the curtain was thrust aside, and an attendant appeared.

"What is it?" demanded the Shah.

"A chupper from Sultanieh, Centre of the Universe; here are his despatches."

"Give us them, and let him wait," and instantly breaking the seals with his own hand, he began rapidly ro peruse their contents: as he did so, his countenance gradually lightened up, his eyes sparkled, and his frame became more erect, but he said nothing. At length, after a few seconds of reflection, he said, "Meerza, leave us for a while, but be at hand. Gholaum Allee, send hither the chupper."

Left to himself, the chief sat in deep thought for a while, then again referred to the papers, and appeared to be absorbed in their contents, when the entrance of the messenger, with a low obeisance, recalled him to himself.

"Good; thou has returned," said he; "what has thou to tell?"

"Shadow of the Universe," replied the man, with an air of deep respect, yet of perfect self-possession very different from that he had assumed in the guard-room, "the Khan of Khumsa and the Wali are together in league with Ismael Khan, who is at present with the Wali, for the purpose of attacking his uncle. This your slave has discovered from a muleteer of his

acquaintance with whom the Wali's chupper travelled part of the way from Senna to Zenjaun. The intention of the Koords and Lours to join in that work, is no secret there; and they talk openly of plundering Ispahan. It is also certain that some of the Khumsa and Gerroos men have already marched to the southward."

"Good; thou hast done well. Heard'st thou aught from the other side of the river?"

"Centre of the World, the Sheghaghees of Miana and Ser-ab, and the Eeliaut of Heshtrood have been called upon, and some of them have already joined the Khumsa levies; before a week passes, the Khan himself will have marched with the rest: his baggage had left the train before I quitted it."

"Barikilla! Allee Khan—anything more?"

"No, Shadow of the World—nothing of importance."

"It is well; keep all this to yourself—remember—here is your mujdeh—begone!" and his Highness handing to the man several pieces of money, the latter took his leave with a low obeisance and departed.

At a signal from the chief, Meerza Sheffea reentered. "The news from Khumsa, Meerza,

are not bad," said he; "you shall see the dispatches by and by—no more arrivals?"

"Pardon me, Centre of the Universe; the messenger from Savah—but he has been unsuccessful. The Hadjee sends excuses seasoned with some trifling offerings, but neither men nor money."

The chief's face grew dark; "Indeed!" said he, "it is well—we comprehend; the ghorumsaug shall ere long meet his deserts;" and the Meerza felt that the Hadjee's fate was sealed,—that there was blood in the eye of his master.

"What from Cashan and Koom?" demanded the monarch, resuming his composure, "have the money and provisions come in?"

"They have, your Highness,—at least the greater part, and the rest, inshallah! will arrive to-morrow."

"Afereen! Moollah Baukher—Afereen! Hadjee Mahomed Hussun, your faces at least are white. But not a word yet from Asterabad?" added the chief, with an anxious tone and look.

"Nothing, Shadow of the Universe, not a word;" but at that instant the king's quick ear caught the sound of a stir in the anteroom, and again he called Gholaum Allee. But before that

attendant could speak, his master half started from his seat, exclaiming, "Jaaffer Koolee, alhumdulillah! Jaaffer Koolee, alhumdulillah!"

"It is true, Centre of the Universe, his Highness Jaaffer Koolee has arrived, and awaits the orders of the presence in the Kessek khaneh."

"Let him come hither instantly: send Aga Allee and Gholam-peishkhidmut Saduk Beg to conduct him to our presence. Moorukhus Meerza Sheffeea, you may retire. Send messengers directly to every district and town to press for their contingents in men and money; threaten the Zabits and Ketkhodahs, but let them beware of abusing the Ryots—mind; and should a single act of peculation or rapacity come to our ears, let the culprit tremble—*Bero!*"

So saying, and the Meerza having quitted the apartment, the monarch, gathering together his papers and despatches, drew his cloak closer round his person, and awaited the appearance of his brother with feelings of a very mingled character. Conscious that the suspicions, which he could never entirely banish from his mind, were not unlikely to be remarked by a keen observer, he had carefully avoided having any witness of their meeting—a meeting to which, though greatly de-

siderated on some accounts, he could by no means look forward to with unalloyed satisfaction. Though his favourite brother, if any might be regarded as such, he dreaded the acknowledged and well-earned popularity of Jaaffer Koolee, as an engine that might one day be turned with effect against himself.

Nor could this alarm be pronounced altogether groundless; for Jaaffer Koolee, burning with all the high aspirations and ambition of a Persian noble, and conscious, no doubt, of his own talents and persuasive powers; disgusted, too, frequently by the harsh, repulsive manners of his brother, had certainly more than once evinced tokens of discontent, and a desire for independence sufficient to startle the jealous mind of Aga Mahomed, although he had never placed himself in that attitude of positive hostility which had too frequently been assumed by others of his brethren.

On the present occasion, Jaaffer Koolee Khan, after the Shah's discomfiture in Louristan by the Lours and Buchtiarees, had been hastily despatched into Mazunderan and Asterabad, the strongholds of the family and tribe, to raise troops and warlike supplies, as well as to remove all evil impressions that might have resulted from the late defeat, and

to confirm the loyalty of the wavering. The chief had too good cause to know and dread the ambition of his brothers Mustapha and Moorteza, and doubted not their disposition to turn his late misfortune to advantage. Nor was he mistaken. Ever since the dispersion of that army, of which, for the furtherance of their own schemes of aggrandisement, they had taken command in the service of Alee Mourad Khan Zend, they had remained in the low provinces; and while Moorteza passed into Gheelan to try his powers of persuasion upon Hedayut Khan the governor, Mustapha, who for awhile had sought refuge in a fortress with a few hundred men, on hearing of his brother's discomfiture, actually took the field, levied troops, and did his best to gain the ascendant in Mazunderan, as well as to make his way good toward the capital by the route of Bostam.

Such was then the very delicate mission on which Jaaffer Koolee had been sent by his brother, who, though ignorant at the time of the extent of the brewing mischief, had, with that indefatigable perseverance so peculiarly his own, turned zealously to provide against the future, to repair his losses and recruit his broken forces. It was subsequent to the departure of Jaaffer Koolee

that the more alarming accounts arrived, and it was not wonderful that in the absence of all intelligence from his emissary, so jealous and suspicious a mind as that of the Shah should anticipate the worst, and attribute his brother's silence and continued absence to the treachery of which he was ever in dread; that he should imagine him abandoning his own cause and embracing that of the rebellious Mustapha. This was the cause of his anxiety for news from Asterabad and Mazunderan, and of the joy which he felt on the announcement of his brother's arrival; yet was that joy dashed by a lingering portion of his habitual doubts, which still tinged his demeanour with a shade of suspicion and mistrust.

The tread of approaching footsteps, which reached even to the Khelwut, aroused him from the fit of uneasy reflection into which he had fallen, and he prepared to receive his expected visitor with the smile of welcome and alacrity; but the cloud returned to his brow as another sound fell on his sensitive ear. It was that of joy and congratulation, which not even the respect and dread which they entertained for their master could suppress among the courtiers and officials in waiting—for Jaaffer Koolee was a general favou-

rite—and in his present mood of bitterness such demonstrations fell harshly on the king's soul.—"Treacherous villains! Thus would they welcome him to the throne itself were a safe occasion to offer," was the first thought that crossed his mind, and was half muttered through his set teeth; "but let them—let *him* beware!"

The door now opened, and the pliant muscles of the chief's countenance resumed the most placid expression; and as the purdeh was held aside to admit the newly arrived traveller, a gleam of joyful welcome shot across his withered features like a sunbeam over a wintry landscape, while he half rose to receive the joyous yet respectful embrace of his worthiest and most faithful brother.

"Ai, Jaaffer Koolee, thou art welcome!—right welcome, my brother; long, long hast thou been absent. Wullah! our brain was dried up; we knew not what to think."

"May your Highness's prosperity increase! We trust that of *us* you could think in no wise save as of your most faithful servant, and most affectionate brother. May God forbid that your Highness could doubt *me*."

"Astafferullah! God forfend! How could we doubt *thee*, Jaaffer? Hast thou not ever in

truth been affectionate and zealous? in whom could we confide if not in thee? But thy news, brother, thy news. They may be worth gold at this moment, man. From whence comest thou now?"

"I would state that I come now straight from Peechuck Muheleh, by the way of Shah-koh, Cheshmeh-Allee, and Dowlutabad, and after having made a course through Jahjerm, Kalpoosh, Finderisk, Gourgaun, and Asterabad; the upper road was impassable from snow; but I heard a good deal as I came along."

"Well, and what did you hear? What of Mustapha? did you see *him*?"

"No; Mustapha I saw not. It would have answered no purpose, and he might have detained me; so that evil reports of me might have reached the presence; but of him I heard not a little: sad it is, truly; but whatever be the cause, there can be no doubt of the fact, Mustapha has been defiling himself."

"Of that, Jaaffer, we need no new proof; what we would know is, the means he possesses of supporting his rebellious attempt; what force has he got together; where he is now; what are his intended movements."

"Your Highness shall hear what I have learned. Mustapha has been doing what he could in Mazunderan, but it amounts not to much. It is chiefly from other parts he has been gathering followers; for everywhere there are broken men, soldiers of fortune, *yerrim masses*, who care not whom they follow, if he but lead them to plunder. There are Kajars among them, and Hajilars, and Toorkomans, and Arab-ajemees, ay, even from my own Bostam; not a few Khorasanees, and no lack of Mazunderanees and Asterabadees. Nay, why start at that? Kajars will follow Kajars without nicely choosing their object, especially when duty to the absent is opposed by fear for those who are present. From all I could gather, the force with Mustapha may amount to four thousand men, and believing that your Highness is in no condition to oppose him, he is marching hitherward. My last information left him in camp near Shahrood; but he can only approach by the low road. It was to apprise you of this that I strove to cross the mountains,—no child's play, by your own august head! and here am I from Finderisk in four days and five nights, one of the last having been passed in the snow on the top of the Shah-koh."

The chief turned his eyes upon his brother with a glance of indescribable feeling. Had tenderness belonged to his nature, it might have been thought to betray itself in the relaxing of his severe features, and the softening of his keen, dark eye. It was a look that seemed to say, "How fain would I love and trust thee, could I but feel perfect confidence in the zeal and the affection thou art ever evincing,—did I not fear that thou too would'st some day turn and betray men!" Could the moisture that glittered on that lid have been a tear?

"Ay, brother, thou *hast* ridden well, nor is this the first or only time; rememberest thou, Jaaffer Koolee, yon night some eight years ago,—by my soul, too, about this very season? On the heights of Khooshkizerd, as we worked our way along the mountains behind Dehgirdoo! There was snow enough then, too,—ay, and cold enough to freeze the heart's blood; but we bore it all, and bore it bravely, too. I remember, thou did'st force me to take thy cloak, because thou said'st it was warmer and lighter than mine? Allah, Allah! how much has chanced since then; yet, here are we all, still;—but no, not all, not all!" added he, sinking his voice, and his

brow became once more overcast, as the memory of those who were gone rose reproachingly upon his soul. But again the cloud of sadness passed away, as the wind licks up the moisture of the softening shower, and all was cold and hard.

"Well, let that pass," said he; "what thinkest thou, after all, of the state of our interests in Mazunderan? Have the efforts of our rebel brother damaged them much!"

"No, by your head, my lord! in my belief your own august presence for a very short time, or the rumour of a single advantage gained, would rally every man in the province to your standard, and turn back the weak or disobedient to their duty; for more than half of those who desert it, do so from fear. Poor wretches! they have suffered so often for opposing the lord of the day, that each leader gains their allegiance during his own ascendancy. I do believe, that had I brought along with me but a handful of troops to show face with, I might have raised force enough to send Mustapha down the pass again."

The chief mused; again did the devil of jealousy rise in his soul; but the present and tangible proofs of his brother's honesty were too fresh and pregnant to be overlooked or misinter-

preted; his better angel prevailed, and the evil spirit fled. "Is it so?" said he; "and supposing him to make his advance unchecked, by what time, think you, could he be here?"

"Why, I would state that the road is difficult, for there is much snow on all the heights; Aheiyoon and Sirderreh are deeply covered, and where snow is not, mud is, worse even than the snow. Neither can he move without provisions, for there is little in that way to be had upon the road; and he is still collecting men. An ordinary leader could not make it out under a month, but Mustapha is fiery and impatient."

"Enough; it will answer. And now, Jaaffer Koolee, listen while I confide to you the state of our affairs, and learn what I propose to do, your counsel will then be acceptable. Thou knowest that since our arrival here,—after that unlucky check at Nehawund from those accursed robbers,—we have been unceasingly engaged in summoning our friends, and preparing for a more fortunate hour; and this, too, has been done with the greater confidence, because it is well known, that our misfortune arose entirely from accidents of time and place having favoured a crafty foe; and not from the skill or power of a

more potent rival. That foe, the plundering Eeliaut of Lauristan, are equally the enemy of our Zend opponent, and are even now in arms against him; and, better still, Jaaffer Khan, like ourselves, alas! has found a yet more dangerous foe in his own family. His cousin Ismael, remembering the ill-treatment which, as thou knowest, he received at the hands of Jaaffer in Ispahan, although subsequently intrusted by him with a military charge, thought fit to make a party for himself among these very tribes. His measures, however, were but ill taken, for Jaaffer mustering his troops, in spite of the snow, marched against his cousin, whose ill-assorted rabble melted from him without waiting for a blow, while he took refuge with the Wali, Khosroo Khan."

"Now the Wali, as thou knowest, is the friend of our house from considerations of gratitude to our deceased father;—may his soul rest in Paradise! He has not only promised to his guest his own aid and that of the neighbouring tribes, but has engaged the assistance of Mahomed Khan, Karagooslee, and Allee Khan Khumsai, who in their turn have united with them the Sheghaghee and other tribes of Heshtrood. Thou

knowest that on these we have never been able to place any reliance; but this coalition, by uniting them all *against* the Zend, will at least neutralize their opposition to us while weakening the power of our rival. Of this intrigue the progress has all along been communicated to us; nor have our efforts to promote it been wanting, for upon it have we relied for the means of chastising Hedayut Khan, reducing Ghilan, and destroying the plans and hopes of Moorteza; and this very morning have I trustworthy information that Allee Khan of Khumsa, and his party, have actually broken ground, and that he himself will immediately take the road to Hamadan.

"This leaves the road open to our operations. We have collected here ten thousand choice troops: this number will be increased before to-morrow's dawn; and three thousand good Eeliaut horse await our call at Casveen. Now mark me, Jaaffer Koolee. Of these troops, three thousand shall be placed under your orders. Thou shalt lead them against Mustapha, recruiting and increasing them from every quarter where success may be expected. To your judgment it will be left either to fight or to negotiate—to manœuvre

and protract the time of fighting, or to hasten the action, as thou shalt see best. I myself, with the rest of the force, will proceed at once to Ghilân. The roads will be bad, the snow deep, the passes difficult—the river, no doubt, will be flooded; but our minds must be made up to all hazards—push through we must. Our left flank is safe, since Allee Khan and his Eeliaut have got their hands full; and let Hedayut Khan, with Moorteza Koolee to boot, stand his ground if he dare. Have you comprehended?"

"By your own august head! by my father's soul! the plan is a glorious one, and must succeed, inshallah!" exclaimed Jaaffer Koolee, excited by the admirable policy and promising prospects displayed in the purposed measures of his brother. As for Mustapha, on my head be it, he will listen to reason and fair terms: he is rash and hasty, no doubt; but his heart is generous and kind."

"For Moorteza, your Highness will have to deal with him. Let me intreat that your justice be tempered with mercy—that you will not forget that in his veins also runs the blood of Mahomed Hoosem Khan."

"Of that, Jaaffer Koolee, have thou no fear. Let Moorteza deal reasonably and frankly with

us, and he will find us well disposed to mercy. Let him henceforth be honest and faithful, and he will meet with confidence and kindness. But for thee, Jaaffer Koolee, when wilt thou be ready to start? for these matters require speed; yet it were cruel to hurry thee, for thou hast ridden far, and must be fatigued, Were it not best that thou should'st seek repose?"

"Ay, by our death! and food too; for scarce a morsel has crossed these lips for four and twenty hours. We are in excellent training, Murg-e-tu!* What flesh there is, is hard and firm enough; but after all, something of food and sleep may be convenient: for the rest, we are ready in twelve hours, if it please you to despatch us so soon."

"Thou shalt have four and twenty, brother, and all your equipment provided. May Allah keep thee for the present! for us, we must prepare for the Salaam."

* By your death! a common mode of asseveration.

CHAPTER V.

THE GUARD-ROOM.

No sooner had the name of Jaaffer Koolee Khan been shouted forth, as that nobleman made his entry at the outer gate of the Ark, and reined up his weary steed, the condition of which, as well as of the rider's person, betrayed the length and fatigue of their journey, than the joyful cries of the guards and loungers at the Durkhaneh, by all of whom he was well known and loved, brought gholaums and attendants to his stirrup, and grooms and furoshes to the assistance of his train, all of whom they found comprised in the person of our friend the Kara Toghaur; but that youth, springing alertly from his half-dead yaboo, ran himself to the head of his master's horse, and seizing the bridle, held the stirrup, while others aided the rider to dismount. The Khan, as he drew his foot from the stirrup, smiled kindly on

him; and turning to some of those who were bustling round him, said, "See and take care of this youth, for, by my soul! he will be found worth the pains."

It was enough: the wearied animals were led away to be tended in the royal stables, while Osman was hurried through the gateway by a group of gholaums; and, before he knew where he was, found himself seated in the midst of the whole troop on duty in the kessheck khaneh, an object of interest and curiosity to all.

"Khoosh amedeed! khoosh amedeed! Seffa guelden! — Moubârik! ye are right welcome! fortunate be your coming!" shouted the whole body.

"Approach here to the fire," said one.

"Bring a calleeoon," called another.

"Off with these wet *lafcheens*," exclaimed a third; while others took cloak and shield, and would have disburthened him of all his accoutrements in their zeal for his comfort.

"Allah-il-ullah! he is a Toorkoman," cried one: "look at that Yemoot bow and arrows!"

"From whence come ye, comrade?" demanded another.

"In the name of Allah," said one of the

elders, with more consideration, " let the poor fellow alone for a minute till he smoke his pipe and warm himself: patience for a little while, and then no fear but we shall have his news."

So the Dark Falcon was left for a minute or two in peace and quietness, until he had sucked the water-pipe and spread his limbs to the heat ; but the impatience of the assembly, which was increasing every moment, could at length endure no longer. An On-bashee, or commander of ten, taking the lead, asked the young man from whence they had last come, and where they had left the rest of their party ?

" Let it be represented," replied the youth, " that your servant only joined the Aga some fursucks on this side Serdereh of Shah-koh, from whence we crossed the mountains to Dowlutabad of Damghaun, and thence came by the low road straight hither. For the Aga's party, they have all been left on the road, disabled or unhorsed."

" And whence came his Highness to Shah-koh ?"

" Of that, Agas, I can say little, save that I did understand him to have been at Jahjerm and Kalpoosh."

" And where then wert thou ?"

" I have already stated, Agas, that I had not then joined his Highness. It chanced that I was on the road when he was in want of a guide: I undertook the office, and have attended him thus far."

" So then thou wert not in his service before?"

" By no means, Aga; never till that time."

" Then please to inform us who thou may'st be: what is thy name? where wast thou born?"

" I would state, Aga, that the *huzrut** there was right: I am a Yemoot lad; but I have seen some service with the Kizzilbashes, and had been long absent from the obah, when I fell in with the Aga."

The attention hitherto paid to the young man by the assembly experienced a considerable diminution after this frank confession. But there was one old man whose harsh and scarred countenance and grizzled beard betokened abundance of hard service as well as of years, and who, after gazing some time on the lad, growled out as to himself,

" He a Yemoot! No more the spawn of a Yemoot Obah than the hawk is a chick of the kite!"

* Or presence, a common appellation of respect to those who are conversing with one.

"Your servant is ignorant of your meaning, Aga," said the youth, who heard the observation, whether intended or not for his ears; "but so far you are right; for though brought up as a khanezadeh (one born in the house), I was but a captive and a slave. I now am free by my master's act and deed; this is the truth, and I have no more to say."

"And well said, too," said the On-bashee; "it is sufficient. Mind thou not Old Hussun Beg. Crabbed stocks will give sour grapes, and Hussun Beg's words will sometimes set the teeth on edge; no blame to thee that thou wert a captive; and what is it to us, if his Highness be pleased, whether thou art Toorkoman or Toork. But thy name youth? thy fortunate name?"

"The name your servant bore in his Obah, was Osman; but he was better known by the *lugub* (or *by*name) of Karatoghaur, given him by his comrades of the tribe."

"Mashal!ah! an admirable lugub! A sharp sighted bird, I warrant; and now come, thy news, comrade. What do they in Asterabad, and among thy friends of the Obahs? Heard'st thou of any gatherings below?"

"*Cherrah?* why not, Aga? Every one there

not only hears of them, but is pressed to join them. Mustapha Koolee Khan, and his partizans take good care we shall not get cold for want of work."

"And how then? do many join his party?"

"No doubt; he has some friends and some money, and fair promises in plenty; and those who live by the sword are all agape for plunder; and Mustapha Koolee Khan's name is high as a successful leader."

"Hum! is that thy opinion? how camest thou not to take service with him, then?"

"Because, Aga, I knew something of his service of old and liked it not. I could feel no confidence in a Kajar who once served a Zend against his own father's son. Never, since I was my own master, has a thought of taking service with Mustapha Koolee Khan once entered my brain."

"Afereen, Batchah! Afereen! this metal has the true sound; inshallah! we shall find it strike as hard, and cut as deep. And what is said to be the strength of Mustapha's force?"

"Of that, Aga, I can say but little; for report varies much. It has been alleged that of all sorts, Toork and Taujik, Toorkoman and Kizzilbash, Khorasanee and Asterabadee, he may

number six to eight thousand. Others say ten; but others again, to whose words your servant would give more credit, declare that it does not exceed three or four thousand, horse and foot. Some Cherwadars who left his camp on the plain close to Shahrood, assured me he could not have many more."

"At Shahrood, Batchah! and had he been there long?"

"No, Aga; certainly not; for it is no long time since his munzil was on the low ground near Ashruff; but he has been actively recruiting since then."

"By the head of our aga, this promises work! thou didst not hear what Mustapha proposed to do? whither he meant to march next?"

"No, Aga, that did not reach the ears of thy servant."

"What talk is this? what use in all these questions?" grumbled Hussun Beg, in the same discontented tone as before. "Will the Jackal tell of the Lion's doings? will the snake warn where it means to sting? The fewer words the less mischief. Let the boy keep his counsel and his news to himself; when our work comes, no fear but we shall hear of it."

"Ai *Tovah*, *Tovah!* Hussun Beg! what words are these? is this your courtesy to strangers? What ill can the youth have ever done thee, that thou abusest him in such terms? What meanest thou, man?"

"What mean I?" replied the old man; "I mean that there is mischief somewhere,—treachery! 'What evil hath he done?' thou askest; I ask, in turn, what but evil was ever found in any of his race? Let our aga look to it. My beard may be gray, but my eyes are good still, Alhumdulillah!"

"La-illah-il-ullah! this is strange, comrade! What race art thou talking of? Thou hearest the lad is no Yemoot after all; how then shouldest thou know aught of his race, when he knows it not himself?"

"Yemoot! no—worse. Worse than Yemoot or Goklan and Tekeh to boot. But let it pass; call me fool, or *fuzool*, as you please, but no such tricks will go down with old Hussun Beg."

While the youth was still gazing with unfeigned surprise at the old man who had so strangely attacked him, and meditating what reply he best should make to it, a trampling of feet was heard

in the passage issuing from the court, and in another moment his new master, Jaaffer Koolee Khan, made his appearance, followed by a number of the chiefs and officers who had been in attendance within, and who clustered around him with obvious marks of attachment. The guard rose to give him the salute, and the Karatoghaur joining in the train followed to his quarters.

CHAPTER VI.

CHARACTERS.

The effects of hardship and fatigue are soon repaired in men whose lives are spent in constant toil and exertion ; and the evening of that same day which witnessed the arrival of Jaaffer Koolee Khan after his rapid and painful journey saw him fresh with renewed vigour, seated in a handsome apartment in another quarter of the Ark, beside a comfortable fire, and surrounded by many of his kinsmen and friends, who had come to pay their respect and enjoy his company on his return, after so long an absence. The hour of evening prayer was past ; and besides the cheerful blaze of the fire, four large wax-lights, burning in candlesticks of brass, helped to dispel the darkness. Everything breathed of cheerfulness and comfort ; conversation was incessant, the only interruption being from the frequent use of the calleeoon,

which, furnished by the attendants, passed often round the assembly. At length came the hour of repast. The long *sofra* was spread before them, and on it the *shâm*, or evening meal, which produced a busy and not unpleasant interval of silence.

When the appetite was satisfied, conversation resumed its sway, turning naturally upon the events which had occurred to the several members of the party, during the time of their respective absences and separation from each other; and much of mutual interest there was to be reciprocally communicated. As the night wore on, however, one after another took their leaves, till but a single person remained with the chief. This person was the same Hoossein Koolee Khan, to whom the reader has already been introduced in the quarters of the officer of the guard, and who appeared to enjoy both the friendship and perfect confidence of the Khan; for the latter, beckoning him to come nearer, while he himself drew more closely round him his warm cloak, and assumed an attitude of greater ease, addressed him as follows:—

"It is well; at length we are alone: and now Hoossein Koolee come hither, Azeez-e-mun, and

let me understand how matters truly stand, and have been going on since I left this for Mazunderan?"

"Ai, Khan! what shall I say? where shall I begin—for there is plenty to tell; yet, by your own death! you will find there are many here gaping for your news, as eagerly as you can wish for ours,—all are burning to know where your Highness can have been bestowed all this time; for strange things were noised about, Wullah! and some began to fear that our Aga was to lose the service of another brother yet."

"Asses! downright asses, Hoossein Koolee; when did they learn to read treason on my brow? But thou, friend, could'st not be so blind—thou might'st have told the beasts they were eating filth."

"And so I did, Aga, Jan-e-tu!* so I did; God forbid I should devour *their* abomination, at least; but these are strange times, and men say they know not who to trust. For Moorteza and Mustapha Koolee, this is not their first mistake, and they are known; but when old, and hitherto faithful adherents fall off and prove false, what are men to say? Think of Abbas Koolee Khan, Koordmeheleh, and Mahomed Hussun

* By your soul!

Beg Furrahbadee,—ay, and these Larijoonees, part of the *peerahun-e-tun-e-shah*—the very shirt of the king's body! when such men turn their backs upon their old friends, and take part with their enemies, can it be wondered at if confidence should almost cease to exist, and that all who are absent fall under suspicion?"

"Well, there is something in what you say; and for those who know me not there is much allowance to be made. But my brother, his Highness,—thinkest thou that *he* doubted? had *he* lost confidence in me also?"

"What statement should I make?" replied Hoossein Koolee, uneasily; "who is there that can read his Highness' mind? Whatever may have passed through that brain of his, he has expressed nothing publicly."

"But how has he acted? something may be gathered from that."

"Ai, Aga! what is to be gathered from the acts of Aga Mahomed Khan? Like his purposes, all are wrapped in mystery.—Wullah! so little is he to be judged like other men, that even where his course seems most plain, I should be apt to read his measures by contraries, and impute to him motives the reverse of those most

obvious. His work is like that of destiny,—we see the effects, but the cause remains concealed."

"It is true, by your own soul it is true, Hoossein Koolee," replied the Khan, shaking his head, and falling into a moody silence, which lasted near a minute. "But his doubts must now be at an end, if they are ever to be so," continued he; "he cannot *now* mistrust me!"

"Certainly not, Aga; the circumstances of your return, and the striking service you have performed, must serve for the present to satisfy even his mind—for the future who shall answer. His Highness would distrust his own right hand, were it long out of his sight."

"Alas, alas! thou art right again, Hoossein Koolee; that very suspicious jealousy has already caused him more loss than all the intrigues of the Zend. But then who is there like him for repairing a disaster? There have been great preparations here already, it seems."

"Ay, Aga, and hard work have we all had of it; who, indeed, but himself could do what has been done after such a miscarriage,—never truly was there a chief like our aga. Instead of denying a defeat and labouring to make it out to be a success, he frankly admits his loss, and only

thinks of repairing it.—Wullah ! he is a wonderful man !"

"Ay, Hoossein Koolee, few can afford to tell truths that make against themselves. But what must be this man's force of character, when, even as a worsted leader, he can raise troops almost at will. The people trust his words, they know that no falsehood lurks behind them ; whereas little credit is given to the fair protestations of others, because they too often serve but as a cloak to deceit."

"Afereen ! It is the truth. Our master, Mashallah ! is a man.—Pity that all cannot perceive his worth, and yield him their willing obedience ; then would his power be secure, and the glory of Iram be exalted. Irresolution rather than dislike causes many to hang back ; they will find their mistake too late ; several districts have refused their contingents, and are already marked for woe and vengeance. Even your own arrival, Aga, confirming, as it will, many in their duty, will be the signal of destruction to others, whose punishments have only been deferred until a convenient time ; we shall hear news of this no doubt ere long, for this very morning more than one party left the camp on errands, not of mercy,

as I should guess from those who were employed."

"Hah! many contingents refused, say'st thou? from whence?—not north of Ispahan?—surely not any within reach?"

"Yes, by your head, Aga! I told you of the Larijoones; then the Eeliaut and militia of Khaur and Vuromeen, have both of them been backward, to say the least of it. Their brains have been turned, it is said, by the Genduck man, whose own head is also full of wind. Then all the central districts—Ferragoon, Austioon, Miskabad, and all; from Savah to Khonsar,—from Koom to Hamadan, every one has been eating the abomination of that dog of a Zend, Jaaffer Khan. Or perhaps that unlucky affair with the Buchtarees has given them a twist, and they have never looked the right way since it happened. But some of them have already met their deserts,—the sword of vengeance has smitten them ere they thought it could be drawn. Your Lordship no doubt has heard of that affair at Tunnacaboon?—how the rebels must have bit their fingers—how their hearts must have melted that night when they found Ashruff Khan and all his Arabajemees upon them!"

"Ay, I did hear of that day of judgment," replied the Khan, thoughtfully; that was the doing of the unlucky Moorteza Koolee. I was then at Nica trying my best to bring the men of Ashruff and Ferahbâd to their duty,—plenty there was to be done, and small means to do it with. From thence I went by Koordmehelah to Asterabad, and hard work we had of it in the very teeth of Mustapha and his partisans."

"No doubt of it; great was the risk, and few there are who would have taken the duty; for alas! in Mazunderan at this time who can be sure of knowing friend from foe?"

"True; and in several instances I had nothing for it but to trust life and liberty in the hands of very doubtful characters; and though, God knows we had escapes and adventures enough, we met—Alhumdulillah! with but few ghorunsaugs. In passing near No-deh, I was hard enough pressed by some of Mustapha Koolee's rascals—Yemoots and Khorasanees; we beat them at last, however. But the worst risk I have run for many a day was only three nights ago, in the pass of Shah-koh. The snow was deep, and the *booraun* roared like a whirlwind,

but my business was urgent, and there was nothing for it but to try the pass. My horses got knocked up,—my people failed; Allah knows whether some of them will ever be heard of again! We were at the last gasp—in truth I had given myself up. The end of the world had come to me, and no doubt my life was gone, had it not been for a young lad, a Toorkoman he calls himself, the servant or assistant of some muleteers, who consented to guide me when every one else refused, and who supported and cheered me up when all the rest failed. Wullah! but for him I should have stuck there till now, but by his aid I got on to a cave at the top of the pass, where, by your head! I found strange company, and very unexpected refreshment."

"Alhumdulillah! Praise be to God, you did so! By your own august head, Khan, this is not right; you think too little of such risks. It may do well for every yaboo, or ass in the army to play with his life as with a straw, or for the hard-headed Mustapha to run his scull against every wall in his way; but for you, the hope of your father's house, the best pillar of the state, the support of the Ashakhabash—Wullah Billah! this is not as it ought to be. As for the youth,

we have heard something of him. A Toorkoman your Lordship said?"

"Ay, a Toorkoman he calls himself — a Yemoot — but in my judgment, no more a Yemoot, Hoossein Koolee, than thou art a Zend. In truth, I thought of shewing him to you before now; by your head, he is worth the looking at; I have my reasons too.—Hoh Batchah!"

An attendant entering, the Khan gave directions that his late guide should be sent for, and in a few minutes, the Dark Falcon made his appearance, in a garb somewhat different from that in which we lately found him. His wet and soiled Toorkoman wrappings, were replaced by the usual dress of an attendant upon a man of rank, and his broad-topped skeepskin cap, had made way for the small conical cap of black lambskin. The alteration effected in his mien and looks by this change, was so strikingly to his advantage, that his master, after regarding him for a moment in silence, addressed him with a "Barikillah, Batchah! thou hast cast thy slough I see, and comest out in fresh colours; but discard not ready service with thy rough case; fine clothes may suit the Durkhaneh; but the times are stirring, and credit me, a working

suit, a stout arm and a true heart will make their way better in these days, than silken dress and courtly manners; we cannot afford to lose our active guide."

"God forbid, your Highness! your servant trusts he may never be found either slothful or thankless; as for work, it has been his daily fare since childhood, and it is not in your Lordship's service, he will ever shrink from toil; for the court, where is it, and where has he been? He knows nothing of it."

"Afereen! we doubt not of your zeal; as for the court, youths such as you have a marvellous faculty of adaptation to its ways: what thinkest thou of what thou hast seen already? does it please thee as well as the obah and the camp?"

"A wonderful place it is, your Highness,—grand and magnificent: never, even in a dream, did I see the like!" said the young man with kindling eyes.

"Ay, boy, but the time for such dreams has not yet arrived—there is hard work to be done ere we sleep—rest must be earned by labour."

"On my eyes be it, my Lord; your servant is ready."

"It is well; and what sayest thou Hoossein Koolee to this animal?" said the chief, casting a

significant glance at Osman as he spoke—"Wilt *thou* accept of him as a Yemoot colt, hah?"

"Yemoot, my Lord? never; never was he foaled on the other side the Goorgaun!"

"What? thou thinkest then with ourselves, that these features have more kindred with the Ester than the Attruck?"

"By your own august head! Aga, I do; it is wonderful."

At this moment, an attendant entered in haste, to inform the Khan that his Meer Achor Allee Beg had arrived, and was just coming to report himself to the Presence; and that Hussun Beg was also in attendance, desiring to kiss the hem of his Highness' robe.

"Barikillah! Allee Beg—already? well done; let him come hither: admit old Hussun Beg too; a snarling ghorumsaug he is, no doubt, but a true and faithful Kajar nevertheless—we must beware of affronting him—he shall be welcome."

In a minute or two, both men made their appearance; when the Khan addressed the first with an "Afereen, Allee Beg—Afereen! welcome for a good servant; thy face is white to-day. Wullah! thou hast made good speed, *Jan-e-tu*. And thou too, Hussun Beg, welcome again;

how has it fared with thee these many days? We are just from thine own country, man; but few of our gallant Kajars are to be found there; all at their posts with their chief—Mashallah! but not all following the same leader; Would it were otherwise!"

"May your Highness's shadow increase—insh-allah!" returned the old man, in his own gruff voice. "Thou hast declared the truth; but what shall be said? What was to be expected from these Euchareebash traitors?"

"Ah, at the old tale, Hussun Beg; ever at these miserable Euchareebashes. For the sake of heaven, old friend, have done with that fancy. Thou knowest his Highness's orders on that score; and for the Euchareebash, search the camp of Mustapha Koolee, and on my head be it thou wilt find there at this moment as many of our Ashakhas as of them. Alas! when even our own family is so miserably divided, what wonder that the tribe at large should not be found united!"

"*Cheh Airuz Kunem!* what is to be said?" grumbled Hussun Beg, silenced, but far from satisfied; "who shall dare to gainsay your Highness; but—"

"But never mind the Euchareebash just now;

let us hear how my worthy Allee Beg—as true an Ashakhabash as thyself—managed to get on so well; why man, not a horse was to be had in Dowlutabad, when I left thee."

"No, your Highness; but soon after your departure, while I was sitting with Baba Takee in his chamber, at the gate of the caravanserai, who should come up, but a well-mounted horseman, whom I instantly recognized as Zulfecar Khan's jelowdar. He did not seem to know me, ensconced as I was in a dark corner, and wrapt in my poosteen; so, no sooner had he laid himself down to take a nap, after swallowing some fried eggs, and seeing his horse cared for, than tipping the wink to Baba Takee, who was by no means ill-pleased at the trick, I walked quietly to the stable, replaced saddle and bridle and appurtenances, led the beast through a gap in the wall, mounted, and rode gently on till clear of the town, then gave the beast the stirrup iron, and was many fursucks distant, no doubt, before its master awoke. He was pretty well done up by the time I reached Semnoon; but I pushed him on to Soorkhkallah, where I had a friend, who mounted me for your Highness' sake; since then, being known, as on his Highness'

business, I have got bravely on. I promised Baba Takee, that your Lordship would not see him come to loss."

"Hah, hah! Afereen, Allee Beg! a capital fellow thou art. Death o' me! no Toorkoman Alamân could have done the business better—Wullah! how the fellow must have looked when he found out the trick; small chance would he have of being mounted at Dowlutabad."

"No chance at all, your Highness; so all he had for it, was to trudge it on foot to Shah-rood, as best he might; an admirable chupper he will prove; Allah send all your enemies like speed!"

"Ay, Allee Beg, and send us such speed as you and I have had, and we shall do well."

"Inshallah!" said the jelowdar, "and praise be to God, your Highness has arrived safe and sound; a perilous night that was, in Shah-koh! by the khan's salt, but for that young Toorkoman, on whom be the blessing of Allah!"

"Admirable! and so you too, Allee Beg, will have him a Toorkoman; dost thou think he bears the marks of that breed?"

"What should I say, Aga? Little could I note him on that night of judgement. We had all enough to do in looking after ourselves, and

keeping our heads out of that unblest snow; scarcely should I know him again; all I could tell is, that he wore the Yemoot dress—"

"Scarcely, indeed, it would seem, since thou dost not recognize him here. Open your eyes, man, and cast them there; is there much of the Toorkoman in these features?"

"La-illah-il-ullah! that our guide? here is a wonder! A Toorkoman? God forbid!"

"What then should you take him for?"

"Chek Airuz Kunem? The Presence sees these features. When were such eyes ever seen but in a Kajar head? and that nose too! On my head be it, he is a true Kajar, and that your Highness, no doubt, well knows."

"Nay, by Allah! to me the truth is not yet known, though I may have my suspicions."

"There is no doubt of the truth; it is as Allee Beg has stated," growled Hussun Beg, with earnest solemnity. "These marks and tokens can never be mistaken. But they all point the wrong way for me. They come from above—not from below; and indicate, not friends, but foes."

"By the death of my father!" exclaimed the chief, turning to Hoossein Khan; "old Hussun

Beg has hit the mark,—Wullah ! little chance of his shaft erring when aimed at a Eukhareebash. Thou art a stanch hunter, old friend, and hast sprung the true game. The trick of that eye is not to be mistaken ; it has the glance of a keen and noble race, and on my head be it, will never play the cheat."

" But what says the youth himself?" said Hoossein Koolee Khan. " Can he give no account of his family and tribe ? With your leave, Aga, let us hear what he can tell us ;—Wullah ! we are friends, who would willingly assist him if we could, were it only for the good service he has rendered to your Highness."

" You hear, Batchah. You have already told me that you were a captive, and not a Toorkoman born ; relate now what you really know of yourself and family. From what passed at Shahkoh it would seem that there must be something worth hearing in your story,—and there are other reasons, reasons connected with your own interest which make us desirous to hear it."

" *Ai, Khodawund !* Ah, my lord, what can I state ? I am your servant—whatever you require, it is my duty to comply with ; for the rest, what should there be in the story of a creature like

me to interest your Highness; still, what there is is yours, and you may judge from it how far I may be regarded as connected with a Toorkoman obah."

At that moment an attendant lifted the purdeh before the doorway, and announced a gholaum peishkhedmut from the Shah; and the messenger having immediately entered the room, intimated the royal pleasure that Jaaffer Koolee Khan should immediately attend the Presence. On this the Khan, calling for the lanterns, immediately rose, tightened his girdle, and throwing his cloak over his shoulders, accompanied the gholaum peishkhedmut to the royal dwelling, desiring Hoossein Koolee Khan to await his return.

The Khan having quitted the apartment, Hussun Beg also rose to depart; "God be with you, Aga," said he, with a look of solemn meaning to Hoossein Koolee Khan; "may His shadow be over thee and protect thee from all dangerous company, and from the evil eye."

"Inshallah, Inshallah!" replied the other; "but what is the evil influence thou dreadest just now?"

"Aga," replied Hussun Beg, with an ominous shake of the head; "a vulture's brood will never

turn out eaglets, though nourished in an eagle's nest; nor will the wolf long refrain from blood, though fed and nourished in the shepherd's home. Allah has divided the Kajars into two tribes, and between them there is blood,—canst thou then ask whence the evil influence may be dreaded? May Allah open thine eyes, and protect thee from all deceivers;" with these words he turned and quitted the room.

"A sad old bear that now, but sound-hearted and stout as steel," said Hoossein Koolee; "truer servant never followed master than that same growler, Hussun Beg. For thee, youth, regard not what he says; it is not thee he rails at, but the stock whence he believes thee to have sprung."

"Ai vai! Aga; by your soul my brain is dried up!—What he aimed at, your servant does not comprehend. In truth the meaning of his Highness's remarks, and of those which have dropped from others since I entered these walls, is utterly hid from me. What he or they believe me to be I am ignorant of,—as for what I myself have to represent, it is soon said. Long before I was honoured by meeting with his Highness, it was your servant's ambition to serve

under Jaaffer Koolee Khan. I met him as a stranger, unknown to me but in distress, and I did what I could to relieve him. Becoming aware of whom it had been my fortune thus to aid, I found my desire accomplished, and joyfully devoted myself to his true and loyal service: but why I am regarded with suspicion by any man, has not as yet reached my understanding, and I would gladly learn it."

"No wonder, youth, that thou should'st be at some loss,—and yet as a captive in the obah thou scarce canst be of Toorkoman blood, and therefore most probably art Kizzilbash. Thy strong resemblance to our own—the Kajar tribe, has been remarked, not only by old Hussun, but by his Highness the Khan, and myself—nay, Allee Beg here has been equally struck by it. But Hussun conceives this resemblance to stamp thee as of the Euchareebash branch, between which and our own, the Ashakhabash, a blood-feud has long subsisted; and the old man has witnessed so much of evil from this unhappy breach, that he regards all of that branch with suspicion and dislike. This is the cause of the old man's ill humour. He is very wrong, for among the followers of our aga there are many

of that tribe as honest and trustworthy as those of his own family; and it has long been the anxious wish of his Majesty to terminate the feud and reconcile a difference so injurious to the Kajar tribe. But old age is obstinate. There is no altering the rugged nature of old Hussun; so faults must be put up with in favour of the zeal and honesty and courage which he assuredly possesses; and thou, youth, must rather seek to soothe his age, than aggravate by retort an ill humour which, after all, can have nothing to do with thee, whom, till now, he never saw, but has for its object a hated race, from which he fancies thee to have sprung."

"Ah, would to Allah that he were right! willingly should I endure his ill will, to earn my place in such a tribe. God forbid, Aga, that I should resent a feeling that arises from such a motive. By your own head! I would rather follow his example,—for Allah is my witness, that be I who I may, my whole heart is with the master I have chosen, and him—inshallah! will I serve and follow until death, with zeal and honesty."

"Afereen, lad, well said! and, by my soul, I believe thee; act as thou speakest, and Hoos-

sein Koolee will be thy fast friend. As to thy race and parentage, we may be right or wrong, as Allah, in his own good time, may shew; but truth and fidelity are of no tribe, and the honest servant builds his own house."

"Ay, Aga," said Allee Beg; "and on my head be it, if thou hast not good and honest service from this youth. Eukharee or Ashak-habash—Toorkoman or Toork—but for him, by the khan's salt! not one of our party had ever left Shah-koh. No doubt our aga had strong motives to make the attempt, mad as it proved; but, were it not for him who stands there, God knows we should never even have reached the Cothul. I owe him a life myself, and Allah forbid I should forget the debt! But we all owe him still more—even our master's life; and shame upon his head who ceases to remember that."

"Thou hast spoken well, Allee Beg; and Jaaffer Koolee himself will be the last man to forget it—of that be certain."

"Ai, Agas," replied the young man, blushing and confused, his full heart speaking from his eyes more powerfully than his tongue; "what have I done to deserve so much kindness?—

only my duty—what I should have done for any traveller, any kafilah that might have sought my poor aid in similar circumstances. May God grant you prosperity!—may your houses be fortunate! Your servant will always endeavour to merit your favour."

"Good, good—no fear of that, Inshallah! and hereafter, at more fitting time, we must hear all about thee, and try to discover thy family. Jan-e-tu! the Khan's curiosity is excited. In the mean time, retire; better take rest while thou canst—his Highness's followers have seldom more of it than enough. Peace be with thee!"

CHAPTER VII.

A SCENE AT THE DURKHANEH.—PROMPT RETRIBUTION.

On the afternoon of the day succeeding the above-mentioned events, the maidaun of the Ark became again the theatre of a busy scene, and was thronged with a multitude of officials and of gazers; for intimation had been given that, at the third hour after noon, his Majesty would come forth from the private apartments, and hold a public audience for the despatch of business in the balcony above the gate of the palace. At this salaam it was that the Dark Falcon, having been directed by his lord to follow in his train, first set eyes upon the celebrated Kajar chief.

As principal noble and counsellor of state, as well as brother to the sovereign, Jaaffer Koolee Khan was among the first to arrive at the gateway of the august dwelling; where, dismounting, he entered, and made his way at once

to the private cabinet of his royal brother. Thus his young attendant had the advantage of seeing the chiefs and officers who came to attend the salaam arrive one by one, and either pass on through the gateway, or mingle with the numerous groups which were fast filling the space before it. As the hour of the salaam approached, a drum was heard, and a *teep*, or battalion, of the karachoghas,* who were scattered here and there about the cannon on either side the entrance, assembled together in order, and then separating, fell back in such array as to form three sides of a square of considerable dimensions, the fourth side being open towards the gateway of the palace. Within this square were collected all who enjoyed the privilege of standing in the immediate presence of their sovereign; while it excluded and controlled the far greater crowd of those who, having no business except to gaze, might have pressed too rudely on the more highly favoured orders.

After a while, the nobles and chiefs themselves retired from the centre of the vacant space, forming themselves into lines, according to their ranks and degrees; and a body of handsomely dressed

* Black coated troops.

and well armed men issuing from the gateway, broke into two parties, one of which took post on either side the gateway. These were followed by other officials, whose dress and the brass ornaments in their shawl-wrapped caps, declared them to be nassackchees and yessawuls; a number of furoshes with long sticks in their hands assisted in repressing, in no gentle manner, the importunacy of the over curious.

Among those who enjoyed the privilege of entering this square and occupying one of its remote corners, along with the more favoured attendants of the principal nobles, was Osman, who now in the complete dress and arms of a confidential gholaum, wore an aspect so imposing that few of the furoshes would have thought of excluding him, even had not his friend Allee Beg been by to smoothe the way for him as well as to explain all that went on. And deeply, indeed, was the young man interested as he saw passing before him, as if for his especial gratification, many of those whose names were familiar to every ear as the great, or brave, or wise, or learned of the land.

But little time was given him for remark, for the Kajar chief was not of those who, regardless of time, dally with the hours that should be devoted

to business, and without compunction keep a whole assembly waiting while indulging some selfish whim, or occupied by some trifle. Punctual himself to his appointments he exacted the same punctuality from others; and, accordingly, when the hour of audience was once declared, every official and man of business knew well that then *he* must make his appearance to time. A slight stir was heard within the court of the palace—the drums beat, the troops dressed their ranks, and, issuing from the gateway, came Jaaffer Koolee Khan, along with a young and very handsome personage, whose noble features, as well as his rich habiliments and arms, sufficiently proclaimed his near relationship to the noblest of the Kajar tribe. It was in truth he, who then better known by the familiar appellation of "Baba Khan," was destined to fill the throne of Persia, and did afterwards become its sovereign under the style and title of Futeh Allee Shah.

After these came Meerza Sheffeah, with a few of the highest chiefs and principal officers of the court; and they had scarcely taken their places in the area below when the trumpets sounded—a signal that the sovereign had come forth: a gun was fired; he was seated; every head was bowed

low; the troops and officers saluted; the drums rattled; the horns and instruments struck up, and the camel artillery fired a salvo. In the midst of this noisy ceremonial, Osman, whose eye was fixed upon the window of the Bala khaneh,* had scarcely time to remark the appearance of a slight figure, whose sallow countenance reminded him of some of the Toorkoman boys of his camp, and who was enveloped in a loose wrapping robe of fur; when a universal and simultaneous *sirfuroo*, or low obeisance of the whole assemblage forced him also to remove his eyes from the object of his attention, and to bow to the ground like others.

It was probably well for him that he did so, for, scarcely had the assembly lifted their heads, when he saw a furosh dart forth and seize a gaping lout who had been caught staring too palpably at the "Point of the world's adoration!"—and, tripping up his heels, which another secured in the ready noose, bestow upon him a merciless shower of blows, which sent him howling and limping away.

When Osman once more fixed his eyes upon the person of his sovereign, his wonder, almost his disgust, were powerfully excited by the sin-

* Or high apartment, from whence our *balcony*.

gular meanness which characterised it; and when he traced the peculiar and, in truth, revolting expression of the features, which the deep-set piercing eye and strongly-marked nose seemed alone to redeem from effeminacy, and the lamentable deficiency in that bulk and *presence*, so much valued by Persians in the persons of their rulers, he could not refrain from mentally asking—could this be the celebrated Kajar chief, Aga Mahomed Khan? Could this be the successful competitor, among so many bold leaders, for the throne? and from thinking how much better bestowed were that lofty station on his own chosen lord and master Jaaffer Koolee Khan.

Business now began in earnest. The sovereign's command having been intimated to Baba Khan, Jaaffer Koolee Khan, and Meerza Sheffeah, these personages entered the gate, and soon appeared standing at the lower end of the Balakhanch, with their eyes fixed upon the ground. Persons were now called for by name; petitions were presented; complaints preferred and promptly enquired into. The affair, at one time regarded a province; at another, the grounds of a village. A ketkhodah, convicted of malversation, was ordered to receive the bastinado; and a governor,

in arrear for revenue, was threatened with a summary collection by the hands of Gholaums, if not placed in the minister's hands within a week.

The affairs of the army received especial attention. The commanders of certain levies, just arrived, were introduced to make their obeisance, and officers were appointed to inspect and report upon their state and efficiency. On the other hand, stern denunciations were thundered against certain neighbouring districts which had failed of producing their appointed contingents. All was conducted with a systematic and business-like air which proved the salaam to be no mere matter of form, but meant for actual work; and there was a silent bustle and an active movement, void of all confusion, which to a practised eye betokened the rapid and efficient dispatch of business.

During the progress of this busy scene the ear was more than once attracted by distant shouts and cries of "*Khuberdar! Rah bedeh*! &c.," as parties returning from service made their way to the Durkhaneh. At length a still greater bustle, accompanied by the trampling of horse, caused every eye to turn towards the entrance of the Ark, from whence a party of cavalry with mud-bespattered accoutrements and jaded steeds, proclaiming

a long and weary march, were advancing towards the square of troops before the palace. Surrounded by the mounted troops were some individuals whose disordered garments and downcast looks sufficiently declared them to be prisoners. Their arms were bound behind their backs, and the bridles or halters of their horses were fastened to the saddles of the sowârs; other captives wore the blue-checked châders, or veils of women, and rode upon mules; while from a pair of *kajawahs*, or covered baskets, used commonly for the conveyance of females, and borne by a stout yaboo, might have been heard the half-suppressed sound of woman's wailing.

Little, however, was the time afforded for speculation or enquiry, for the party having escorted their prisoners through the crowd, halted at the exterior rank of the square of troops, which opened to admit them. The escort then fell back and received orders to dismount, while their commander went forward to report and present his prisoners. Although such occurrences at the court of a severe and determined sovereign, whose subjects were frequently engaging in evil or rebellious proceedings, were by no means rare; there was something in the appearance of the prisoners

in question which excited a very general interest among the bystanders ; and every head was bent forward, and each eye strained to catch a sight of the unfortunate group.

It consisted of two men advanced in life, whose habiliments bespoke a rank considerably above that of ordinary villagers ; two others of a lower grade, and three young men, of whom one in particular was of a sufficiently prepossessing appearance. There were also several women besides those contained in the kajawah, which latter were permitted to remain there concealed. A low, half-suppressed murmur ran through the crowd, and reached the ears of Osman and his friend as they stood contemplating the captives—" From Savah !—the Zabit of Savah !—and his brother of Mishkabad !—ai-vai ai-vai ! what has come over them ! what dust has fallen on their heads ?"

The women, so soon as they found themselves thus brought forward, and comprehended where they were, began to prostrate themselves, uttering loud lamentations and cries of " Amaun ! amaun ! —for the sake of Allee—for the sake of the blessed Fatimah—in the name of the holy Prophet ! "—while the old men, placing themselves as far as their bonds would permit in attitudes of

the humblest entreaty, made less noisy appeals for mercy and pardon.

At a signal from the Bala kaneh a nassackchee stepped forward and commanded silence in an accent and with gestures which speedily enforced compliance. The clamour of the women sunk at once into a low wail; while the men, in silent anxiety, bent their eyes upon the being in whose hands they felt their earthly doom to rest.

Their suspense was not suffered to endure long. The commander of the party gave in his report, which did not of course reach the ears of Osman at the moment; but we shall give its purport in order the better to explain the scene which followed. The conduct of the Hakim of Savah, in withholding his contingent, as already mentioned, had so deeply exasperated the Kajar monarch, who saw in it not only a wavering loyalty on the Hakim's part, but a ruinous example to the central district governors, if allowed to go unpunished, that he resolved to inflict a chastisement which should strike terror into all other would-be rebels, and produce a prompt, if not a willing, obedience; and to this step he was the more encouraged by the intelligence from Khumsa, which promised full employment for his Zend opponent, as well as by

the opportune arrival of his brother from Mazunderan, which set him at ease in that quarter. Thus, no sooner had he dismissed Jaaffer Koolee Khan, on the morning of his arrival, than he summoned one of his most active and trustiest Euzbashees, and directing him to take sixty of the best mounted horsemen which the camp could turn out, including a dozen of his own Gholaums, to proceed with all despatch to Savah, managing matters so as to arrive at night, to enter the town suddenly, and proceed direct to the Zabit's house, to seize his person, and such members of his family as could be got hold of; while others, acquainted with the place, should pursue the same course with two or three more of the Reish-suffeeds, or elders of the place, and, having secured them, to return, without an instant's delay, by the way they came, bearing the culprits to Tehran.

The chief could not have intrusted this mission to a surer or more trusty hand than Baber Beg, who was a true *sung-dil* (heart of stone), and who had not a thought beyond that of discharging whatever duty his master might require him to perform. An hour after receiving his instructions, saw himself and his party in their saddles and clear of the city walls. Striking directly across the

country, and avoiding as much as possible all villages, by an hour before midnight they were close to the place. There, in a hollow beside a little water-run, they refreshed their well-trained horses, feeding them moderately with the barley which each man carried in his tobrah, and having rubbed them well down, after an hour's halt each man was again in his saddle. The ruinous walls of Savah offered but little obstruction to the stout horsemen of Aga Mahomed Khan, and being well guided by a native who was of their troop, they made their way good, scarcely disturbing even a dog, to the house of Hadjee Allee, the zabit or governor of the place. This was immediately surrounded by the greater number of the party, while one or two small detachments filed off to perform their duty in other quarters.

Great, as may be supposed, was the consternation of the inmates of the Hadjee's dwelling, when awakened from sleep they saw themselves in the grasp of armed men, and loud was the outcry they raised at first. But this was soon silenced by the leader of the band, who, shewing his naked sword, swore in terms and voice evidently not to be trifled with, that the next who uttered shriek or cry should assuredly feel its edge. He then directed

that the whole family should be mustered in his presence. "Let the women put on their chadars and prepare for an immediate journey," said he; "Let them beware of any attempt to secrete themselves or escape—their lives will answer for it."

"And whither dost thou purpose carrying these helpless ones, worthy commander?" enquired the Hadjee himself in trembling accents.

"That thou wilt soon learn," replied the Beg, "seeing they are to travel in thy company and to the same place."

"Ay, but to what place, Aga," insisted the trembling man; but the Euzbashee sternly recommended silence.

"Are all the family here present?" demanded he. "These women shall have ten minutes to prepare themselves; for thee, man, thou quittest not this spot. Hoh, Hoosseen Allee, and thou, Shumsheer Beg, begone! Search the premises, prick every hole and corner with your swords' points, bring hither all ye find."

A low wailing was now heard from the women, who seemed to anticipate something very dreadful from these mysterious arrangements; on which the Euzbashee, desirous probably to quiet their

disposition to outcry and clamour, said, with some effort at gentleness, "Fear not, Bajees;* I swear to you that no evil is intended to your life or honour; only be still and do as ye are bid, and ye shall be safe. Gholaum Allee, look to the stables; no doubt the Hadjee has got beasts there, on which these respectable ladies may ride; see them prepared forthwith."

In a short time, the men who had been sent to search the house, returned, bringing an addition to those already collected of a young man and two females, whose sobs were truly piteous, together with an elderly man of highly respectable appearance and a countenance of much dignity. The latter, addressing himself to the Euzbashee, enquired whether he were the commander of the party; and on receiving a dry reply in the affirmative, he demanded by what authority this outrage was committed.

"Friend," replied the Euzbashee, "the authority we act under thou wilt find it vain to dispute; so thou had'st best submit in silence. Thou doubtless art of this family, and must accompany them."

* Bajee—sister, a kind appellation addressed to middle-aged women.

"I am not of this family—I am but a guest, and claim the guest's privilege to go free."

"A guest, sayest thou? and from whence?—who mayest thou be? None can be permitted to depart without at least our knowing who they are."

"I am known as Kerhelai Baukher Allee, and am Zabit of Ferraghoon; and these are of my family. It was my purpose to have departed hence on the morrow, and now desire my freedom. If ransom be thy object, it is ready."

The Euzbashee smiled grimly. "The Zabit of Ferraghoon, hah?—it is well—thou also goest with us. For thy ransom, it is not with us that question can be settled."

"I cannot and will not go with thee; my duty calls me homewards, and powerful as thou and thy band of robbers may suppose themselves, let them beware of violence."

A shout of alarm and call for assistance had but half escaped his lips when he was seized—a cloth stuffed into his mouth, and his arms bound behind him. A soldier entered to say they had found and prepared several mules and a pair of kajawahs, on which the whole party, men and women, were led out, and bound on the mules and spare horses. The women themselves selected

those who were to occupy the kajawahs; and they were just about to quit the space before the Zabit's house, when the other parties joined them, each in charge of sundry prisoners. The same stern discipline had been employed to enforce silence on these also; and now it was even yet more strictly enjoined, as the whole of the men springing into their saddles, noiselessly but swiftly filed through the lanes and ruins towards the point at which they entered the town. From the moment when the party first halted at the house of the Zabit, until they repassed the walls and shaped their course through the gardens beyond them, little more than half an hour had elapsed; and long ere morning broke they had halted to feed their horses, in a hollow several fursucks distant from the town and far out of reach of pursuit.

Little of rest or sustenance did the well-trained horse and horsemen of the Kajar chief require when duty demanded despatch; thus, though the distance to Savah and back to the capital could not fall short of thirty fursucks, or a hundred and twenty miles, they found no difficulty in accomplishing it, and reaching the city by the hour of evening salaam on the day following that on which they started. It is probable, indeed, that their

sagacious master had made his calculations, and purposely arranged the time of public audience so as to produce a powerful effect upon the assembled multitude by the arrival of the prisoners at that very hour.

The Euzbashee having been summoned to the space below the Balakhaneh, then made a full report of his proceedings, which he terminated by representing that the Zabit of Savah and his family, together with two elders, or ketkhodahs of mehelehs, and the Zabit of Ferraghoon, with part of his family, were in presence, awaiting the pleasure of the Centre of the Universe!

"Barikillah, Baber Beg!" replied his Highness. "Praise be to God! thy face is white today; thou hast done thy duty as a good and zealous servant, and it shall not be forgotten. For the present, *Moorukhus*, thou may'st retire: refresh thyself and the men: their services may be required again before long."

The Euzbashee made his obeisance and retired. There was then a pause, and a deep anxious silence; during which the Shah, beckoning to his minister, held with him a short conversation. The Meerza then retired back to his place; and at a signal given, two nassackchees stepped for-

ward ; and seizing hold of the Hadgee, who trembled so violently that he could scarce stand alone, led him forward towards the Balakhaneh. The unhappy man broke out into earnest supplications for mercy, and would have prostrated himself, but for the officials who held him on either side, and who sternly enjoined silence. That silence was broken by the shrill harsh voice of the Shah himself.

" At length thou hast made thy appearance—thou art welcome ! Unhappy wretch ! Thou hast eaten thy fill of abomination, and now comest to receive thy reward. Once did we spare thee, upon thy solemn oath of future loyalty and fidelity ; and how hast thou kept that oath ? Thou did'st believe that our power was curtailed and our arm shortened, that it could not reach thee, and thou hast basely turned against him who had shown thee mercy and forgiveness—against thy prince, to whom thou did'st swear to be faithful and true. Doubly traitor, to us and to the Zend : thou art now convinced, too late, that our arm is yet long enough to seize and to punish wretches who attempt to play with us the dangerous game of treason."

" Amaun, amaun !—mercy, mercy ! It is true,

I have erred: I have eaten filth, indeed! but by the holy Prophet of Islam, by your own august head, let thy slave be but forgiven this once, and for ever after he will be faithful to the Presence—never again will he depart from his duty!"

"Thou art right there—in truth he shall not: we swear it by our own life," retorted the Shah, whose features had put on the hard contemptuous sneer which was wont, on such occasions, to characterize them, and which betokened too faithfully that there was no mercy there. "No man deceives us twice; but still thou shalt be fairly dealt with: Allah forbid that we should refuse thee full justice! Thus, then, stands the case. Thou did'st swear to obey our commands; to discharge faithfully towards us thy obligations as zabit of thy district, among which was that of providing a certain number of men for our service, and a specific amount of money and stores. We ask of thee now, how hast thou fulfilled these obligations? We demanded that contingent — our acknowledged right — no more; and now we ask thee Where is it?—where are the troops?"

"By the life of the Presence! by my own death, I swear that the thing was impossible!

but, inshallah ! they shall be produced ; by the head of the Shah,* they shall, in five days."

" Pah !—base-born hypocrite—abject deceiver ! Wilt thou still hope to cajole us ? Impossible said'st thou, wretch ? Look here—look at this paper—there—hand it to him : let him examine it, and answer if he dare."

The unhappy wretch started at sight of the scroll, but making a desperate effort to recover himself, he exclaimed, " It is nothing—by your souls it is nothing !" but he was silenced by a blow on the mouth from an iron-heeled slipper. A signal was then made, and three men started forth, truculent looking fellows, clad in dark-coloured garments. These were the furosha-e-ghuzub, ministers of wrath, well known by the heavy swords slung under the left shoulder, and wearing in their belts the dagger and knife used in their dreadful trade. As these men seized the miserable Hadjee and forced him to his knees, a shriek, wild and irrepressible, arose from the women ; and one of the young men, a fine looking youth, the best favoured of them all, breaking from those who held him, rushed forward, and

* No man dares to swear by the Shah's life—that is, to imagine the possibility of his death.

flinging himself prostrate beside the old Hadjee, cried "Amaun, amaun! may I be your sacrifice: spare my father, and take this life for his!"

A murmur of pity and applause burst at this sight from the spectators; but the Shah, cold and unmoved, as it seemed, calmly signed to have the lad removed, and accordingly he was borne away to the spot whence he came, passionately reiterating his appeals and supplications. In the mean time, after the lapse of some seconds, accorded, perhaps, to allow the ebullition of feeling excited by this incident to subside, the royal head was seen to nod; the fatal word, "Bekoosh!"—*Slay*, was uttered, the dark blade waved in the air, and in another moment the head of the victim flew forward almost to the very gateway; while the trunk, after a few convulsive struggles, lay quiet and motionless in the pool of gore which spouted in streams from the gaping arteries.

Such scenes were too frequent at the Durkhaneh of Tehran to call forth more than a momentary shudder, and that only from those of the spectators least accustomed to them. But on this occasion the general interest was almost immediately directed to another object; for Kerbelai Baukher Allee was now brought forward,

in the same manner as his friend and relative, the Hadjee, whose remains lay bleeding before him. But the Kerbelai's mind was framed of sterner stuff, as might be gathered from his demeanour on this trying occasion, for he uttered neither prayer nor remonstrance ; but casting a look more of indignant disgust than of terror on the mutilated body, he reared himself to his full height, and after one full unquailing glance at his terrible judge, stood calm and collected for the event.

The Shah also regarded the prisoner with a keen and searching eye ; but not a touch of feeling was to be detected in that impenetrable countenance as he thus addressed him :

" We have desired thy presence, Kerbelai : thou, too, art welcome. We would learn what madness it is that hath seized on the Hakims and Zabits of Qulumrow, and blinded them both to their duty and their interest, insomuch that they will turn against the light and strive against the stream, until, one after another, they are overwhelmed and lost ? Wullah ! it is strange. Thou, Kerbelai, art not unknown to us : thou art spoken of as a man of wisdom and discretion —one who can see with the eye of judgment, and takes counsel of prudence ; yet here art thou

also a-wandering like the rest. Yet hast thou not been a false traitor, like that carrion there. Thou art a man, Mashallah! ay, of the very stuff we would choose for our trusted servants. Now, open your eyes and look around, for this day must thy choice be made. To Kajar or to Zend thou must perforce belong, and thou mayest now see where the power is to reside. Before three days are past thou wilt find that Jaaffer Khan has his hands too full to help, or to be helped by thee; and canst thou believe that a drunkard and a debauchee like him, who lives but for his pleasures and neglects his friends, is the fittest man to rule Iraun? Now listen and attend: get thee back to thy charge; take with thee the son of this fool, on whom I bestow his father's place, under thy supervision: there is stuff and spirit in the lad; see thou that they be rightly directed. But for thy family and his, they remain here with us, hostages for ye both. Fear neither for their honour nor their safety so long as ye are true to your salt and your oaths: praise be to Allah! never had faithful servant cause to complain that his interest suffered in our care. But beware: one false act—one treacherous attempt—one failure in strict obedience, and

the furoshes for them—the Nassackchees and the knife for you. Thou hast discovered that our arms are not short: thou wilt see them lengthened ere long. Let the youth advance."

The son of the slaughtered Hadjee was now brought forward, his bosom still heaving and his countenance bearing tokens of the mingled emotions, horror, indignation, and distress with which he laboured. But these were not the times, nor this the country, for the uncontrolled display of high and generous sentiments; and those who entertained them soon learned that a regard to personal safety imposed the necessity of self-restraint. Whatever might be the true feelings of the Kerbelai or his young relative, no expressions but those of gratitude and devotion were suffered to escape their lips. Indeed the unexpected boon of pardon, with the prospect of further favour, at the very moment when, from the terrible scene they had witnessed, they anticipated nothing less than death or ruin, had doubtless a powerful tendency to soften the acerbity of their feelings towards him who was thus the author of both their weal and woe.

The Kerbelai and his friends were retiring, after tendering their acknowledgments, and the

Shah was in the act of giving directions for the safe but honourable custody of the hostages, when a woman's voice was heard, remonstrating with her guard, and exclaiming that she had a representation for the *Huzoor*. These words were caught by the quick ear of his Majesty, though half drowned in the bustle around her, and he demanded aloud to know who it was that had spoken? Thus encouraged, and the noise having been suspended by the royal enquiry, the woman raised her shrill voice still higher, and declared that her demand was for justice.

"Let her approach," said his Highness, "and state her own case."

"Ai, Khodawund!" exclaimed the woman: "thou hast declared thyself to be a dealer out as well as a demander of justice, and thou art called *Ryot-purwur*—protector of the Ryots. We are your ryots: thou hast claimed our allegiance, and we have sworn to thee fidelity: let us not seek justice, then, in vain. Thou did'st send thy people to seize the guilty: had they thy commands to rob the innocent?"

"How meanest thou, woman?" demanded the Shah, with darkening brow; "explain thy words."

"The meaning of thy slave, protector of the

poor, is this; that one of thy soldiers, when searching my house, as he said, for hidden culprits, broke open a box containing my property, and took thence a bag, with twenty good tomauns in silver and gold, together with a string of sixteen coins of gold, and several armlets of silver and stones, besides other ornaments and rarities: this is the complaint of thy servant, and it is the truth."

Before making any reply, the Shah, with a kindly countenance, issued a rapid order to his minister, and a messenger was seen to dart at speed after the party who had brought in the prisoners, and who, having lingered for some time, doubtless to see the issue of their own work, had but just left the maidaun. Then, turning to the female, his Majesty thus addressed her:

"Woman, thy words may be true, or they may be false: what proof hast thou to offer of their being worthy of credit? Should'st thou recognize the robber were he brought before thee?"

"Without doubt, Shadow of the Universe! Thy servant has cause to recollect him; for when he seized the money, I strove to force it from his grasp: we struggled, and he threw me violently from him, and hurt me much. I saw and marked

him well. He was tall and ill favoured, and had a scar upon the cheek, which divided his right moustachio."

"Of this thou art certain?"

"Certain, Huzrut."

In a few minutes the party, headed by the Euzbashee, returned to the maidaun, and were ordered to dismount and enter the square of troops.

"Are all thy men present, Baber Beg?" demanded his Majesty.

"All, Shadow of the Universe!" replied the Euzbashee, casting his eye along the double line. But no! there is one place empty. Ah! I see,—Gholaun Allee Dehbashee! what has become of Killich Allee Affshar?"

The Dehbashee replied that he knew not of his absence; the man must have separated from the rest when the party was dismissed, after delivering up charge of their prisoners; and Baber Beg having so reported to his Sovereign, orders were issued for the immediate apprehension of Killich Allee.

His Majesty then directed the woman to examine all the men present, and to point out among them the robber of her property: but after a

strict examination she shook her head, declaring that the culprit was not among them.

After some time, during which other business was transacted, it was reported that the messengers had returned with Killich Allee.

"Where was he found?" demanded the Shah.

"In the stable, tending his horse, Light of the Universe," was the reply.

Five other men were now called forth, and being placed in a line, with Killich Allee among them, the complainant was directed to examine them also; and scarce had she cast her eyes over them, when, pointing to Killich Allee, she exclaimed "This is the man, Khodawund!" and in truth the description she had given of the thief tallied so perfectly with the appearance of him she now fixed upon as the culprit, that little doubt could be entertained of her correctness.

"Ghorumsaug!" said the Shah with a stern countenance, "what is this we hear of thee? was it to rob and plunder women that thou wert sent along with these brave fellows? Is it thus our ryots are treated by scoundrels such as thee? What reply hast thou to make to thine accuser?"

"That she lies, your Highness—that she eats

dirt. Whose dog am I, to go and rob *zaifehs** when on your Highness's service ?"

"Thou hearest, Nana ! he denies thy charge."

"By thine own august head, Huzrut, your servant tells the truth. What more can she do ? He has eaten the goods—on my head be that. I have no more to say."

"Will it content thee if we have his person searched ?—If not in his possession, how are we to discover the truth between thy affirmation and his denials ?"

"Protector of the poor, the goods may probably not be on his person. For what purpose did he hurry away with so much speed from his companions, if not to hide his booty ? Besides, at the first halt we made on the way hither, towards morning, when the rest only loosened the girths of their saddles, this man took off his, and I saw him busy with the lining of it—the gold may have been placed within it."

"We shall see," replied the Shah ; and a confidential person was immediately despatched to bring saddle, horse, and trappings from the stable to the palace."

"They will find nothing there !" growled Killich Allee, in a sort of triumphant undertone.

* Weak ones—old women.

But the eye, if not the ear, of the Shah caught the expression of the accused. He demanded of those around what had been said, and they did not dare to conceal it. His Majesty said nothing, but addressed himself again to other matters until the horse and saddle arrived. One of the royal jeloudars was then directed to examine the saddle, the lining of which exhibited a newly-ripped opening, with a corresponding hollow in the pad beneath it.

This being reported to his Majesty, he directed the jeloudar's attention to the back of the horse, which was found to be swollen just under the opening of the pad, and salt and water had already been applied to reduce the swelling. The numud, too, usually placed under the saddle on the horse's back, was chafed and worn.

"Dost thou still deny the theft?" demanded the Shah of the culprit, when the examinations were concluded.

"What further should I represent?" replied the man doggedly—"I have already said that the Zaifeh eats dirt; the rest is in your Highness's hands. Your servant is here, search him, or kill him at your pleasure!"

It is not our pleasure to do either; but we

will that you produce the woman's money and goods, to the very last article. "Hoh there! furoshes! take that fellow, and let him have the sticks till he does so;" and instantly the man was dragged away to one side under charge of a Nassackchee; the horsemen were once more dismissed; the villagers disposed of, all but the complainant, who was directed to await the issue of the proceeding in her case. In fact, before these directions had all been obeyed, the matter was nearly disposed of. The culprit bore the blows for a while with wonderful constancy, continuing to assert his innocence; but, as the torture by degrees became less endurable, his cries for mercy increased until they might be heard all over the maidaun; and in due time he roared out lustily that he would tell everything—that he would restore the whole. On this the blows were suspended until the prisoner's confession should be communicated to the Shah: who, on learning it, gravely nodded his head.

"We never doubted how it would be," said he; "let the things be restored to the woman—restored without diminution or reserve; and, Nana, if it be not so, declare the same to those who shall have charge of thee—declare it fearlessly

as thou hast done to us at this time. Mashallah! thou hast done well—please God! no one shall dare to use such freedom with the Shah's ryots. For the culprit, he merits death; but the man is a stout soldier, and the state cannot afford to lose such. Let the blows he has received be made up to five hundred, and then let him be cared for and cured. Killich Allee rides well, though he sometimes makes mistakes: he now owes us a life, and we shall permit him to redeem it some day or other in the field."

"Ay, Batchah!" said Allee Beg to Osman, who had regarded the whole scene with flushing cheek and deep excitement; "that now is what may be called justice, ay, and good sense too, Mashallah! Well, truly may our aga be called the ryots' protector; and as for justice, what Câzee could have picked truth out of such a mess of lies so cleverly? Wullah! he has an eye like a hawk, and a judgment like Lôcman's. After all, he is the true ruler for Persia—your soft-hearted shahs are all *pooch!*"

The salaam soon after terminated, the crowd separated, and comparative quietness settled over the maidaun, late the scene of so many stirring incidents.

CHAPTER VIII.

HISTORY OF "THE DARK FALCON."

THE morning following these events saw Jaaffer Koolee Khan at the head of some two thousand foot soldiers, six hundred well-mounted and efficient horsemen, including a hundred of the royal gholaums, and a detachment of camel artillery, in full march from the capital. He took an eastern course, and leaving on his right hand the shrine of Shah Abdullazeem and the ruins of Rhê, held on by the foot of the left-hand hills, on the high road to Khorasan. Near him, along with other officers of rank, rode Hoossein Koolee Khan; and in his train of personal followers, with Allee Beg and Jan Koolee, was the Dark Falcon, now gallantly armed, and mounted on a stout and powerful horse, rejoicing in the new sphere of action and hope of distinction thus opened to his ambition.

To a youth naturally aspiring, no situation could be more gratifying than that which he now occupied, nor could there be a prospect more exciting than that which it opened to his view. Placed by a happy combination of circumstances in the service, and high in the favour of the very chief whose character he had so long regarded as the pattern for all gallant leaders—at a time, too, so pregnant with opportunities for signalizing himself—what had Osman further to desire? Or if there were, indeed, some feelings of a different and softer character harboured in his heart, it was, for the present at least, controlled, if not stifled, by the more immediate objects of stirring interest which wholly engrossed his mind and absorbed every sense.

The Khan, impatient to advance at all events, and particularly desirous to get rid of all the entanglements of the capital, pushed on to Keboot Goombuz, where he expected to be joined by a reinforcement of the Kazanchais and Seng-e-serees of Helbarood and the hilly country; but these not having arrived, he was forced to remain until the return of messengers despatched to quicken their movements. It was during this unexpected detention, that on the evening after their arrival

at Keboot Goombuz, Allee Beg summoned Osman to the quarters of Hoossein Koolee Khan, who, having kindly welcomed the young man, reminded him that he still owed them the account of himself which should have been given them at Tehrân, adding, "There is little chance of interruption here, and your story will serve excellently to pass an hour or two this night; so, Bismillah! take a seat; you and Allee Beg, there, and begin."

"Alas! Aga," said Osman: "I fear you expect too much from my poor tale. What can there be to interest such as you in the story of a Toorkoman captive: yet what there is shall be at your command."

"Good, we shall see; go on, and be sure to let us have it all; for I promise you his Highness himself takes an interest in the matter, though he cannot afford time just now to play the listener."

Thus commanded and encouraged, the Dark Falcon seated himself respectfully at the lower end of the small room, while Allee Beg took post on the opposite side of the doorway. Hoossein Koolee Khan kept his place at the upper end, close to the fire, which roared and crackled in the chimney; and all things thus arranged, the young man began as follows.

" Your servant has already stated that he is utterly ignorant of who or what his parents may have been. All he can tell respecting his origin is, that he was made captive while a child, possibly from some Kizzilbash family; but the first home of which he has any distinct recollection is the tent of Oghuz Aga, on the banks of the Parow river; although occasionally a dim and shadowy trace, as of some former condition of life, does flit across his brain.

" It is no doubt known to your Lordship, that Oghuz Aga is a Yemoot, chief of the Osmanboy tribe, who enjoys considerable wealth and influence among his people. The principal seat of his obah was a green and sheltered recess, formed by a shoulder of the Parow mountain, that projects into the valley; and beneath it ran the clear stream of the same name, which, rising among the barren eastern hills, flowed on to join the Attruck in the plain beyond. It was a sweet and pleasant spot, Aga, and many a happy hour have I spent there with those I may never meet again!" He paused for some moments, unable to repress the emotion which his own recollections excited.

" Captive though I was," he continued, " my master treated me like a son. I played with his

children as a brother, and mixed with the others of the obah as with equals. I met with no painful check to remind me that I was a slave, nor did I feel less a Toorkoman than those with whom I dwelt. In truth, my master, though boisterous and sometimes violent, was naturally frank and kind in disposition, and loved to see those around him happy and contented. But such was not the case with all his household. My master himself had his troubles to bear, and his servants could not hope entirely to escape.

"Oghuz Aga had two wives, differing as much in age, as in disposition and personal attractions. The first, whom he wedded when young, was the daughter of Hyder Kisseh, chief of a branch of the Tekeh Toorkomans, whose obah was at Germeh Khan, and widow of one who had been a noted leader of Chuppows, but who had unfortunately got killed in an ambush laid for him by the chief of Boojnoord. She had never been remarkable for good looks; but was known in the obah as excelling in all the accomplishments of a good housewife. She was strong and active; could make more butter, prepare more cheese, preserve more *keskh*,* make finer carpets and better horse-

* Dried buttermilk.

cloths, weave finer webs of silk and cotton, or camlet, strike and put up an alachick,* load or unload a camel more dexterously, and milk, bake, or cook more skilfully than any woman on the banks of the Attruck; and, above all, manage her slaves, and rule her household with a sway which brooked no remonstrance.

"She was the very perfection of a Toorkoman's wife; and Oghuz Aga, then a young man, though of no mean fame, resolved to become the possessor of such a treasure, although her price was high,—so high, indeed, that few could compete with him for the purchase. He was rich, and wisely thought that she was the very woman to watch over, and add to his wealth. So he paid down the money, a hundred tomauns in cash,—good golden pieces,—and as many camels, they say; and, in due time carried her to his tent, where he soon found that, notwithstanding all her accomplishments, her haughty and violent temper would make her a bitter enough bargain. Nothing, however, remained but to make the best of it; and Oghuz Aga did so. By this lady he had two

* *Alachick,* or *kergah,* or *kannaut* are names for the movable houses of the Toorkomans, formed of felt on a framework of wood.

sons and a daughter, and for a while she held her place as undisputed mistress of his household.

Such, however, it was not her fate to continue; and to her own evil temper it was that she owed the change. Long before his marriage with her, there had fallen into the Aga's hands a little girl, a captive like myself, who with others of her family had been taken in some of the quarrels among the tribes about Asterabad, and had been sold to the Yemoots. Having then no harem of his own, she was placed under care of his mother; but when he married Zehreh Khatoon, his first wife, the young captive, then well advanced towards womanhood, was, along with sundry other gifts, bestowed upon that lady. It was a sad day for the young Goolsebah, when she exchanged the kindness of a mother for the tyranny of a jealous wife; for the promise of beauty in her young attendant speedily excited the alarm of the banou, and rendered her harsh and severe upon the poor girl.

"But this jealous severity proved the means of defeating its own ends; for Oghuz Aga, who had not previously paid any particular attention to the girl, was led, by the causeless harshness and ill-humour of his wife to remark her beauty;

and, after several vain attempts to put a stop to the tyranny from which she suffered, resolved to place her in a position which might protect her from such attacks in future by making her his wife. Unfortunately, this well-meant measure had not all the success which the Aga contemplated. The banou could not indeed continue to inflict upon her successful rival the same kind of punishment as before; but the hatred with which she regarded her became doubly bitter, and her purposes of revenge were deep and deadly. She never let pass an occasion of taunting her with those deficiencies in household accomplishments, in which she knew herself to excel; and as the poor girl, never robust, became still more delicate after her marriage, and less able to assist in domestic duties, her spiteful rival found still more frequent opportunities of casting up to her her useless beauty, and disqualifying feebleness of person.

"At length, Goolsebah became the mother of a little girl, who promised to inherit her mother's beauty, and unfortunately, her delicacy of constitution also. But Oghuz Aga was delighted with his little daughter; and, strongly attached to the mother, did all he could to render

her comfortable. He was as gentle to her himself as his nature would permit,—but, to soften the spirit of the banou, was beyond his power; while, to deal very severely with the head of his harem for matters connected, as he was sharply informed, entirely with the internal regulation of his household, was a measure which Oghuz Aga, at least, could not bring himself to resolve upon. The consequence was, that his interference did rather harm than good, and the weakest-minded was driven to the wall.

"Stung with the repeated taunts of the banou, Goolsebah would exert herself to take her share in the household duties, and not unfrequently did herself harm by efforts beyond her power. At length, one day, when not far from her second confinement, her persecutor called on her to assist in striking one of the large alachicks; in doing which, she gave herself a fatal strain, and fell to the ground severely hurt. I happened to be near her at the time: her gentleness and kindness had, long before, made me love her. I looked upon her as on a mother, and never let slip any opportunity of assisting her when in my power. On this occasion I ran to her aid; and, while the banou only laughed

at her visible weakness, helped first to complete what she had left of her task, and then went up to see her as she sat resting against some sacks of grain that had been carried out of the tent.

"She was very ill. She patted my head, and took my hand, but was unable to speak; and her husband coming up, she was taken into one of the tents which still remained standing; and there, as I learned, gave birth to a dead child. The march, nevertheless, proceeded; she was put into a kajâwah, and carried to the fresh encamping ground, which she never left alive. She called me to her side, and from that hour while she lived I seldom quitted her. The poor thing seemed, indeed, quite broken-hearted. She never had been strong enough, either in mind or person, for the situation in which her fate had placed her, and was totally unable to bear up against bodily sufferings, unalleviated by the kindness and sympathy which alone could have given her spirits to sustain them.

"All she cared about was her little girl, for whom she seemed to anticipate a fate as sad as her own; and, child though I was, the sight of her distress moved me so much that, while doing my best to comfort her, I cried more than

she did. Ah! how beautiful she looked, as she lay pale and exhausted upon the mattrass beside which I sat—her large black eyes almost hid by their long lashes, which seemed to rest upon her smooth cheek. Those eyes!—I shall never forget them! By your own head, Khan, they were as like those of our honoured Aga, as if she had been his daughter."

"Afereen, Batchah!—wonderful, truly!" exclaimed Hoossein Koolee, with a laugh, which was summoned up rather to disguise the emotion which the young man's tale had excited, than from any lighter feeling. "The Khan's eyes like those of a dying girl! a strange resemblance indeed, and one not very easily accounted for, I should say, in that quarter of the country, at least. But, Bismillah! go on."

"Nay, Aga, you may smile, yet I swear to you, that never did I look at the Aga's countenance, bold, and manly, and joyous as it is, without its reminding me, in some unaccountable manner, of the wretched Goolsebah, with her mild, pale, dying face, the picture of a broken heart, as she would clasp the little Zuleika to her breast, and beseech me, little though I was, to watch over and be kind to her child: and I,

wild with grief and indignation at those who had reduced her to so sad a condition, swore that I would never lose sight of the little creature, but be for ever her servant, and guard her from every mischief.

"Much cause had the poor dying woman to dread for her daughter, the same hostility which had been so fatal to herself; for the banou's hatred was implacable, although her malevolence had sustained a rebuke from Oghuz Aga, which cowed even her imperious spirit for the time.

"Shocked at the condition of his favourite wife, and his eyes too late opened to the cause, he had broken out upon her rival with a fury which forced her to slink away with conscious dread.

"But there was another and more effectual check put upon the evil spirit of the banou than the occasional outbreak of her husband's wrath. The mother and daughter possessed a protector without whose aid their doom would probably have long before been sealed. This was no other than that singular woman with whom his Highness became acquainted in the cave of Shah-koh, as the Khan has doubtless heard, and who had been a frequent visitor in our camp. She was

known there only by the appellation of Bhowanee, the Hindee *fakeereh;* but who she was in reality, or whence she had come, no one could tell. Report declared her to be of Indian birth; and she was supposed to be skilled in the dark mysterious sciences, cultivated so much in that distant region, particularly among the fakeers and brahmins of the Hindoos.

"The first appearance of this woman in the obah occurred soon after Goolsebah, as a child, fell into the possession of Oghuz Aga; and, in the course of her subsequent visits, which were made at irregular and uncertain intervals, it became evident that some previous, though unknown connection subsisted between her and the young captive; for the little creature, so far from expressing alarm or disgust at the fakeereh's singular appearance, would cling to her with an obvious expression of recognition and pleasure, while she, on her part, though seldom heard to speak, would hover round the tent which contained the little girl, and gaze with delight upon her countenance. As for our people, superstitious to an extreme, like all Toorkomans, they were puzzled what to make of her. Some shuddering at those eyes of hers, which,

when she chooses, shed so terrible a light, took her for some *ghôl* or *afreet*, forced by a superior power to linger on earth for some fearful purpose; and, as such, avoided her: others regarded her rather as a guardian jin or peri, who chose to assume this shape in the eyes of mankind, in order to intimidate them from injuring the being under her protection. Others, again, would have her to be only a human being, but a sorceress, of kin to those fakeers and calunders, who, crossing the mountains of Balckh and Caubul, or Badakshan, frequently take their way through the Toorkoman country on the steppes of Khaurezm, in their course to the west; and who, no question, are most of them proficients in magic. The child was frequently interrogated; but no distinct or intelligible replies could be gained from her; and if any one ventured to question the fakeereh herself, the replies, if any they received, were neither calculated to enlighten them, nor to encourage further inquiry.

"In this way did the fakeereh Bhowanee continue her visits to the obah, making her appearance as suddenly and unexpectedly; bestowing looks of approbation on all who showed kindness to her *protégée*, and scowling so wrath-

fully as to terrify any whom she believed disposed to treat the little creature with coldness or contempt. After a while, however, she ceased to appear; much to the distress of the young Goolsebah, who pined for the sight of one who, to her, had been a most kind and devoted protectress. In time, however, her regret passed away and the fakeereh appeared to be forgotten; nor was she any more heard of until after the marriage of Oghuz Aga with the banou—Goolsebah was then the banou's handmaid, given to her by the Aga himself, who, at that time, had no suspicion of his wife's evil disposition, nor imagined that he was dooming a timid and gentle dove to the gripe of the merciless vulture.

"But the evil spirit soon broke forth. Already had harsh rebukes, mingled with taunts, been poured upon the uncomplaining victim, and her health and spirits were alike failing, when the malice of the banou received an unexpected, though but a temporary check. One evening, after darkness had closed in, Oghuz Aga was seated in his tent, while his wife was setting his *shâm*, or dinner, before him, with Goolsebah attending upon their, or rather *her* orders. It happened that some trifling omission on her part

called forth a sharp reprimand from the banou, which, though received in silence, produced a flood of tears; the Aga was good-humouredly interfering to excuse her, when the entrance of the alachick became darkened for a moment, and a tall figure, in a strange dress, stood before the party.

"In a moment, before there was time for thought, all who had ever known the fakeereh felt a conviction that it was she; and the glance of her terrible eyes, burning with fury and directed full upon the banou, left not a doubt of the fact. 'Woman!' said she, in a voice that thrilled every heart, 'beware! thou treadest on a drawn sword. If mercy or justice cannot move thee, let regard for thy own safety prevail; for be sure that the evil thou wreakest on that helpless one, shall fall with tenfold weight on thee and thine. And thou, oh man! who hast hitherto sheltered this flower of beauty—thou whom Providence has made her guardian, how is it that *thou* hast shrunk from thy duty? Beware thou, also, beware of that tigress, and watch that she bring not ruin on thy house by the crimes she commits unchecked of thee!'

"Agas, if ever human eye possessed the power

of striking those it hates by a glance, it was that of the fakeereh Bhowanee; even now, when she wills it, its expression is terrible, but in those days, when its almost demoniac lustre was heightened by the fire of youth, its gleam, when agitated by fury, was intolerable. The banou shrunk from it, as if a jin or afreet had glared upon her suddenly; and even Oghuz Aga remained amazed and confounded, while Goolsebah flew to her old protectress, who embraced and led her from the tent.

"Before morning, it is said, the fakeereh had disappeared as suddenly and unaccountably as she came; but the impression she left was strong enough to produce a very salutary influence upon the banou's conduct to her slave, and though it wore away in time, a second visit of the terrible Bhowanee again recalled her to moderation in the exercise of her malevolence towards the unhappy girl. It may be, that this last visit confirmed the mind of Oghuz Aga in his purpose of making the persecuted girl his wife; and Goolsebah herself, in hopes, no doubt, of enjoying greater comfort, consented readily to her master's will. But both, as I have represented, were deceived; for to change a nature like that of

the banou was hopeless, and Goolsebah the wife was little better off than Goolsebah the slave. The nature of the persecution was changed, indeed, but it was not the less harassing, and terminated, at length, in the result I have described.

"The term of the unfortunate Goolsebah's life was near a close. She lay almost inanimate upon a couch, her face of a clayey paleness, her beautiful eyes half closed, with one arm listlessly extended by her side; while the other sought to clasp the little Zuleika, as she lay in her bosom, when, as formerly, without word or warning, the fakeereh Bhowanee entered and stood by her couch.

"Child as I was, well do I remember her appearance, as with a softened glance she gazed on the dying woman. 'And has it come to this?' said she in a voice, the tones of which were like low music; '*Tukdeer!* destiny! who can contend with thee? Fair flower, thou art broken, but woe to the hand that hath bruised thee!'

"The attention even of the dying creature seemed roused by these low sweet tones, for she opened her eyes with a gleam of recognition,

and faintly smiling, tried to stretch forth her hand; but the effort was beyond her strength, and the hand sank back upon the couch beside her. The fakeereh knelt, her countenance had lost its sternness, as she took the feeble hand, and imprinted a kiss upon the livid lips—'Ay,' she said, 'thou could'st not depart without this. In these arms thy first breath was drawn; it was meet they should enfold thee while gasping forth thy last; this too was written, and thus is it accomplished!' With these words, she clasped the frail form to her breast, and held it there for some moments: then gently laid it on the couch. When I looked again upon the face, I felt it to be that of a corpse.

"For some few moments longer, the fakeereh continued to hang over the sweet but fixed features, and I saw that her own were strongly convulsed; a tear seemed even to be trickling down her deeply furrowed cheek, but the moisture in my own eyes may have deceived me. Then passing her hand on the half open eyes of the dead, to close the heavy lids, she took the little Zuleika in her arms, and on rising, I saw that her face had become calm and cold as ever.

"'Boy,' said she addressing me, 'thou hast lost one who was to thee a mother; but merit thou a mother's care, and thou shalt never want one. Attend; to thee as to a brother, hath that dying one bequeathed this child. On thy head be it, if thou neglect the charge, which *I*, as well as *she*, commit to thee. Child though thou art, thou never wilt forget this hour, nor the duty it has laid upon thy head;' and stretching forth the little Zuleika, I kissed the pretty lips which the infant held out to me; never, in truth, can that moment pass from my memory. 'Ay,' continued the fakeereh, 'she accepts thee for her protector. Of kindred races, see that ye cling to each other, and Allah, in his own good time, will work out his own good pleasure!'

"Scarcely had these things passed, when Oghuz Aga, hearing from his slaves that his wife was dying, hastily entered the tent, followed almost instantly by the banou. Both started on seeing the fakeereh, but turned their eyes immediately from her to the couch, where lay the immediate object of their enquiries. The chill and rigid sharpness of her ashy countenance left nothing to be told, and Oghuz Aga covering his face without a word, sat down by the body, and

gave vent to a burst of emotion. The banou feeling that she was in the presence of one whom she could not deceive, affected neither to weep nor lament, but stood, hard as iron, though inwardly conscience-stricken and dismayed, with her eyes sternly fixed upon the body.

"'Ay, weep, for thou hast lost her!' said the fakeereh to Oghuz Aga; 'she returns no more: and who shall replace her in thy bosom? Such has been the will of Allah; for his creatures there remains but submission. For thee woman—vile and evil instrument of the Most High! on thee, as on her, shall that will be fulfilled, and tremble at the vengeance which awaits thee. Beware that thou add not to the black account by persecuting the daughter as thou hast destroyed the mother.' With these words, and placing the child in the arms of the banou, which were mechanically stretched forth to receive it, she glided from the tent, before those who were now collected there became aware of her movements.

From this time, however, she returned frequently to the obah, and evinced more decidedly the interest she took in the little Zuleika. She would even remain there for days, and sometimes pass

whole nights beside her, absorbed in meditation. No one, however, knew whence she came, or whither she went, nor did any one seem inclined to attempt the discovery. But the effect of her impressive appeal at the death-bed of Goolsebah, maintained, as it was, by the more frequent, but still irregular recurrence of her visits, was strongly apparent in the altered conduct of the banou. The bitter scorn and jealousy disappeared with the death of her rival, and though gentleness or kindness was not to be expected from a character like hers, she did cease to persecute, and even paid some attention to the nurture of that rival's child, and Zuleika grew up in health and beauty.

"But the favour of Bhowanee was not confined to Zuleika. Each time she came, I received from her marks of kindness which, not less than the impression made by the scene of Goolsebah's death, made her visits interesting to me; indeed, I was, perhaps of all the obah, the only one who regarded the fakeereh with least of apprehension, One day, it might be nearly five years after our first acquaintance, I was sent with a comrade to look after some strayed sheep; and having separated in the course of our search, I ascended by myself, the shoulder of the Parow mountain; tracing as

I believed the track of the missing animals, until I found myself unexpectedly on a far higher part of it than I had ever reached before. But that which chiefly fixed my attention, was the remains of a building, which I remembered to have seen from below, and which was held rather in awe than in reverence. For though formerly a place of pilgrimage, and sacred to Huzrut Allee, son-in-law of the blessed Prophet, with whom be peace ! it had now become regarded as a haunt of evil spirits.

" I remember, Agas, that on discovering how near I had approached to this dreaded spot, a cold shudder came over me, and I was half inclined to fly ; when a noise, which I took for the bleating of a sheep, induced me to venture further on ; and I had almost reached the building, when I was rooted to the spot, and my hair rose upon my head, at the sight of a being which issued from an arch in the wall, and which I doubted not was one of the evil spirits of whom I had heard. It was long and lean, and almost naked ; its tangled hair floated loose in the wind, giving to a head of preternatural size, an air of unaccountable wildness. It was tossing about its meagre arms in a manner that added to

the strangeness of its appearance; and no sooner had it perceived me, which was immediately on its issuing from the building, than it bounded towards me with fast and fearful leaps; while I, powerless and horror-struck, was unable to move a step from where I stood.

"But though my feet were tied, my tongue was not, as the shriek, or roar, which I gave when the creature clutched me, sufficiently proved; and so great was my terror and confusion, that not until my arm was dropped by the supposed fiend, and that accents of melody, recognized even at such a moment, fell upon my ear, did I become aware that another person was present. On looking up, I beheld the fakeereh, who with a gesture of authority was motioning to my enemy to leave me. He did so, and retired back to the tomb, with an unearthly yell or laugh, which might well be taken for the mocking of a fiend.

"The fakeereh then soothing my alarm, enquired of me what had brought me hither?

"On my telling her, she bade me return to the obah, and never to venture hither again; 'for,' said she, 'you might find better founded cause of alarm than at present, and no aid so near.' She then told me, that by pursuing a particular

direction, I should find the stray sheep: and having accompanied me a short way, to put me in the right path, she left me, and returned to the mausoleum.

"Confounded as I had been by this startling adventure, it was not for some time that I could calmly call to mind each circumstance, and try to comprehend the whole affair. But the more I reflected, the more was I bewildered. Was it, indeed, an evil spirit that had seized me? and had the fakeereh in truth exercised her power over jins and demons to set me free? If so, with how much of awe and terror did this invest her! yet how valuable must such a protectress prove, and how fortunate was I, in having become the object of her care! Still it was fearful, and whatever might before have been my childish belief, I could now scarcely regard the fakeereh as one of the simple race of mankind.

"Yet I loved her, in spite of doubts and fears. To me, she never showed anything but kindness; and even the mystery in which she lived and moved had its charm for my young mind; so that when present I clung to her involuntarily, and longed for her when absent. So powerfully, indeed, did this longing after her work

upon me, that, in spite of my terrors and her warnings, I could not refrain from occasional visits to the Parow mountain, where I had some idea that she dwelt, and even to the vicinity of the very place where I had suffered so great a fright. Like the moth that flutters round the candle, I hovered round the spot which fascinated me by its very mystery, in spite of all its terrors.

"One day, it might be a twelvemonth after my first adventure, while occupied as usual in herding sheep or camels, I wandered on, following rather the unperceived impulse of my thoughts than any fixed purpose of my will, until I had got far among the inequalities which lie at the foot of the Parow mountain. It was now the fall of the year. The weather had been chilly, and beasts of prey had already been heard howling round our folds and tents; so that there was nothing extraordinary or unusual in observing, as I turned the foot of a hillock, several wolves at work upon the carcass of an animal in a hollow just behind it.

"Desirous to discover what they had got hold of, I advanced towards the spot; when three of the creatures, quitting their repast, advanced to-

wards me, snarling and showing their teeth. This I was not prepared for, as these animals seldom attack a human being, except when pressed by extremity of hunger; and, doubtful what to do, I remained standing at fault until they had approached pretty near; when, whether encouraged by my irresolution or my diminutive size, they advanced at a canter and open-mouthed upon me.

"I still can remember the horror of that moment. More in terror than in boldness, I shouted out aloud to drive them away, and brandished the club which I carried: but all was in vain. The fierce animals persisted, taking a circuit round me and coming nearer and nearer, until I could almost feel their breath upon my face, while my shouts were converted into one long roar of unutterable terror. At length, the largest of the creatures, making a sudden bound, threw me to the earth; and all would soon have been over, had not a shout, louder and fiercer far than mine, been heard close by, and a rapid footstep approached. The wolves started, listened, and then stole growling away, leaving me upon the ground with my clothes torn, but little injured in my person.

"When I dared to open my eyes, I saw bending over me a figure wearing something of the human form, but, so terrible in appearance, that the wolf seemed the less savage of the two. He was tall, and of huge proportions; a thick fleece of grizzled hair supplied, in some degree, the place of clothes, covering his broad but hollow chest, his body and uncouth limbs, and mingling with the tangled beard and matted locks, which last were partly bound up in a mass upon the top of his head. A very sharp and highly arched nose rose between two lank and furrowed cheeks. But his eyes were the most remarkable feature of his frightful face; for, from whatever cause, they shone like burning coal—it was almost impossible to sustain their look; and his fingers ended in huge talons, like those of some enormous eagle, or beast of prey. Around his waist he wore what seemed to be a rope of hair, twisted in a thousand ways. Down his back hung the skin of a bear; and, crossing his breast from the right shoulder, was seen a cord of loosely twisted thread. The iron-shod club, which he had wielded in his hand to drive away the wolves, was now planted firmly on the ground, as he leant over me with a look

of grim inquiry for nearly a minute; then, seizing me by the arm, he spoke to me in a deep, harsh tone, but in words which I did not understand.

"I got upon my feet, however; and, after an attempt to express my thanks for his delivering me from the wolves, would fain have left him to make my way homewards; but he, casting upon me a yet more terrible look, and still holding my arm, muttered a few more unintelligible words, and then he begun to move forwards in an opposite direction, dragging me along with him. Alarmed at this, I would have resisted; but his strength was too great for me to contend with, so that I was compelled unwillingly to follow. Afraid to offend by vain opposition, yet filled with terror of I knew not what, I still could observe that we were proceeding in the direction of the mysterious building where I had seen the fakeereh, and the hope of meeting her somewhat soothed my fears; while a recollection of the creature from which she had delivered me there, as well as of her warning, came back upon me with a feeling of disgust and apprehension. I had no choice, however; for the savage relaxed not his grasp until, wearied

with the pace at which he ascended the mountain, as well as worn out with my own fright and uneasiness, I stumbled and fell to the ground. On this, without further word, he raised me in his arms, and, throwing me over his shoulder, kept on his way as before, without heeding my expressions of distress, which now burst from me in spite of myself, or appearing at all to feel his additional burthen.

"At length we reached the ruin, but it appeared deserted; and my heart sunk, as the man, lowering me from his shoulder that he might stoop to pass the archway, and taking me under his arm, carried me through an empty hall to the mouth of a yawning chasm, into which he forthwith descended. On this, terror took full possession of my soul, and I screamed aloud with all my strength. The man, with a sound like an imprecation, gave me a shake as a hint to desist; and, in another moment, I found myself, along with my conductor, in a cavern, the size of which I could not at once discover, and which appeared to receive its light from a hole in the roof, at a considerable height above our heads. Here, pointing out a piece of mat on the floor, and putting a handful or two of parched rice

into a gourd for me, he turned to quit the place. I cried and clung to him, beseeching him not to leave me alone in that horrible hole—to take me with him, at all events; but, shaking me rudely from him, so that I fell to the ground, he disappeared in the darkness before I could rise from it.

"Alas! what a state, for a child, was I left in, Aga! Weary, and broken-hearted with terror —shut up in darkness, and in a place which I fully believed to be the haunt of demons, and by so savage and terrific a monster, what had I to look for?—what could I anticipate, but some horrid death? Nay, the gloom that surrounded me whispered of things more terrible than death itself, because mysterious and unknown. Thus, for a time that appeared to me interminable, I could do nothing but cry aloud for help, and bemoan myself. But, as no one came, either to help or molest me, my mind became somewhat more tranquil, and I rose to look about me.

"My eyes, now better accustomed to the darkness, were able to discover what the imperfect light prevented me at first from observing. The cavern was extensive; its walls, in part at least of mason work, were blackened, as it seemed,

by smoke, as well as the vaulted roof. But that which first fixed my sight was a small lamp burning before certain dark objects, which struck me with an indefinable dread, but which, nevertheless, I could not refrain from approaching. The lamp burned in a small niche, and shed its light upon a horrible black image, bearing some rude resemblance to a human being with many arms; the teeth of which grinned hideously white from its red mouth; and the eyes glared with a silvery gleam!

"My hair stood on end with horror, and my knees shook as I stood before this frightful image. It was some time before I saw that there were others of a similar appearance around; and that before the principal idol, there was an altar covered with the remains of various substances, among which I could distinguish drops of black and clotted blood. Alas! my own was turned to water at the sight; and I sunk upon the ground before the blood-stained altar, and hid my face in my hands.

"But to continue thus, was impossible—it never was my nature to endure suspense when in my power to terminate it; so I rose, resolved to seek out and discover the worst. Accordingly,

I cast my eyes around, and saw that in the walls there were niches containing objects, varied in shape, though similar in fabric to the first-seen images; but the darkness prevented all minute investigation. On one side, however, and at some little distance in front of the altar, there was another object which attracted my notice. It was a strong and peculiarly shaped fork of wood; the stalk of which rose about a cubit height out of the ground in which it was firmly fixed, while the prongs attained about the same height above the stalk. I approached this instrument with a sensation of mysterious awe; I touched it—it was wet and clammy, and my fingers were stained with clotted gore. Beneath it there was a pool of the same, which the saturated earth had not yet drank up.

"If horror and death were in my thoughts before, imagine, Agas, what must have been my feelings with this palpable evidence of murder before me! Even now I shudder to remember what I suffered then; but praise be to Allah! mine is not a heart to be easily dismayed, and the life of a Toorkoman boy is not ill calculated to strengthen a stout spirit. I remembered the words of the fakeereh, and comprehended some-

what of my danger. I felt that I had fallen into the wolf's den; but it only roused me to exertion, to try whether it were not possible to effect an escape.

"Half frenzied with eagerness, I hurried round the walls of my prison, seeking for the entrance—but all in vain: nothing met my touch but rock, or wall broken here and there into inequalities, by niches and recesses, which gave no hope of liberation. I looked up at the opening above, but it was far beyond my reach; and whether it were imagination or reality, me-thought I saw a hideous and fiend-like countenance grinning down upon me from the edge of the chasm.

"At length, worn out with fatigue, and bewildered with horror and excitement, my senses, or my consciousness at least, failed me; and dropping on the mat which had been pointed out to me, I fell into slumber or insensibility, which must have lasted for a considerable time.

"I was roused, at length, by the glare of a light flashing on my eyes, and on opening them, as soon as I could distinguish objects, became aware that two persons were bending over me; the one held a lamp, the other was the monster who had seized me. For a moment, I thought

myself still dreaming, but that delusion was soon put an end to by a rough grasp on the shoulder. Faint and stupified, I could only gaze around me with dismay, which was not lessened by observing that the new comer had, stuck in his girdle, a heavy-bladed knife, the handle as well as the steel of which bore indubitable marks of its use. Thus, when the man who had laid hold of me pulled me up, I felt satisfied that it was for the purpose of being murdered, and, accordingly, uttered a loud scream. The roughness of the man who strove to silence me did not tend to pacify me, and there is little doubt of what the result would have been, had not another person suddenly appeared in the vault and mingled in the group. The light fell upon her countenance, and I recognized the fakeereh!

"Oh, the ecstacy of that moment! Suddenly wrenching my arm from the gripe of him who held it, I rushed to her, and, throwing my arms around her knees, besought her in piercing accents to save me from death, to take me from these terrible men! She returned my caresses, and keeping off with one hand the men who sought to recover their hold of me, threw the other round my person, and spoke rapidly

and eagerly to them in a language which I did not understand. But they appeared by no means disposed to listen to her. Their words were few, indeed, but rough and determined in tone, while those of the fakeereh continued earnest and conciliatory. Oh, with what painful eagerness did I watch the effect of her pleading! and how did my heart sink, as I heard their violence increase and their gestures become more threatening. At length, the fakeereh uttered some rapid words in a tone of greater energy and, as I thought, decision; on which the monster who had taken me, strode forward and seized me with a dreadful imprecation, while his companion drew the bloody cleaver from his girdle and brandished it in the air. A mist came over my eyes, and the bitterness of death seemed upon me, when the fakeereh, changing all at once her manner, plucked forth from her bosom a long, sharp dagger, and, drawing herself up into an attitude of great majesty, spoke and gesticulated vehemently for some moments. The effect was immediate; the men desisted from their violence, and, after some further conversation, carried on in a more temperate key, turned away and disappeared in the darkness

at one side of the vault, while the fakeereh, whispering some words of hope and comfort, and bidding me expect her return soon, followed them immediately.

"As for me, notwithstanding the deliverance which had evidently been wrought for me by the fakeereh from immediate death, and the hope of release held out to me, I was far from satisfied at being thus still left in this horrible place. There was something so frightful in the whole adventure, and so terrible in the beings who had taken part in it; their power of evil appeared so great, and I so wretchedly weak in their hands, that my mind refused to be tranquillized; I sat me down and tried to compose myself, but in vain; to feel at ease, or persuaded that the danger was over, was impossible: flushes of terror would come over me, and I could not refrain from sobbing and weeping from agitation; and when I thought of my home, and all whom I loved there, I abandoned myself to passionate bursts of grief.

"It was afternoon when I was first taken to this accursed vault; and my sleep or swoon had lasted, as it seemed, during great part of the night. Darkness still prevailed when I was thus

a second time left to myself, for I could see the stars shining brightly through the chasm above. How the hours passed I knew not; but the sun had been evidently some time risen when I was once more startled by the approach of a light footstep. It was the fakeereh, who, placing her finger on her lip, presented me with some food from a basket on her arm, and made signs for me to eat. Comprehending that there was occasion for caution, I obeyed in silence. So great hitherto had been the agitation of my mind, that though faint and weak, I felt no actual hunger; but now that the means of escape were before me, and that food was placed within my reach, the cravings of nature made themselves felt, and I ravenously devoured the victuals.

Hungry as I was, however, my anxiety for freedom was too great to permit me to dally with my meal, so that in a few minutes I made signs that I was ready. Accordingly, my protectress taking from my head my cap of sheepskin, and throwing around me a ragged and dark-coloured cloak, took me by the hand and led me across the floor of the vault. How it was accomplished, I knew not; but a passage opened where certainly I could find none be-

fore ; and, after proceeding a few yards in darkness, and mounting some broken steps, I perceived that we were in the same hall, through which I had been dragged by my ruffian conductor. Again the fakeereh made an expressive sign for caution and silence ; and pointing to an arched opening that gave entrance into a smaller chamber, I could distinguish the form of a man asleep, as it appeared, upon a mat beside the embers of a fire. She quickened her steps, which fell so lightly as to produce no sound ; and I required no other inducement to imitate her speed and caution.

" We were soon beyond the walls of the ruin, and certainly the air and sunshine had never been to me so delightful. The morning was, indeed, well advanced, but the dew still hung upon the grass, and light vapour floated over the plains, even to the distant Caspian. All over head was blue and serene, and my heart leaped with joy as I gazed around, and felt that I was free. But my guide, who appeared still uneasy, hurried me on until a little bit of rising ground shut us out from view of the building ; even then, while seeming to draw breath with less constraint, all she said was, ' On, on, my child !

on and quit this place!' So on we went as fast as we could go, choosing always the less exposed parts of the hill-side; and threading our way among *teppehs** until near noon, when on emerging from a hollow, along which we had wound for some distance, I could discern the obah of Oghuz Aga in the plain, still a considerable way beneath us.

Here the fakeerch stopped; and pointing to the camp, said 'Behold, rash boy! behold thy dwelling. How, after my warning, did'st thou dare to venture on this forbidden ground? Learn that but for the intervention of a power which thou canst not comprehend, thy young blood had by this time been curdling on the floor of yon dungeon; and that Almighty Power whose will it was to save thee, alone can tell what evil may still result from thy folly. Begone to thy home, and as thou would'st avoid the fate thou hast so narrowly escaped, let no word of what thou hast seen breathe from thy lips. Henceforth, should aught lead thee to desire my presence, or require my aid, beware of seeking me yonder, but take and place this stone in a hollow thou wilt find beneath that blasted tree by the

* Small hillocks

old tomb at the foot of this mountain; should I then be within reach of the Attruck, thou shalt see me within the twenty-four hours.'

"So saying, she put into my hands a smooth black stone, engraved with signs and figures; and bidding God protect me, she placed her hand upon my head, and turning from me, was soon out of my sight. For my part, musing on all that had befallen me, but rejoicing in my wonderful escape, I returned to the camp, where my absence had scarcely been remarked, as it was no uncommon thing for lads in charge of herds and flocks to remain abroad for a night when belated in search of stray beasts. Thus I kept my own counsel, and the mysteries of the Mâzâr of Parow remained unknown to the obah.

CHAPTER IX.

THE "DARK FALCON'S" HISTORY CONTINUED.

"NOTHING worth relating occurred for the next two years. As customary with the youth of our tribe, both native born and *khaneh zadehs*, or house-born slaves, among whom I was regarded, I took my turn with the men in warlike or plundering expeditions, and had the good fortune so far to distinguish myself, as to obtain the name of "karatoghaur," or The Dark Falcon, by which I have for several years been chiefly designated; for though young in years, Allah, praise be to his name! had endowed me with a strength and activity, and particularly with a keen power of sight, which frequently rendered me useful. But the first affair of importance in which it fell to my lot to be concerned, was when his Majesty, after the Vakeel's* death, arrived to give light to

* Kereem Khan, who, though in reality King of Persia, while he lived called himself only *Vakeel, or agent* of the Empire. He was chief of the Zend tribes.

our eyes in Mazunderan. Along with my master Oghuz Aga, who had unfortunately embraced the cause of Mustapha Koolee Khan, I found myself opposed to the true light of Iraun ; and thus did I remain employed, until the arms of the Centre of the Universe, became successful; and the power of his foes being broken, many of them took refuge with the leader of the Zend. These invaders, however, having met with their deserts in the passes of Mazunderan, were forced to take their way back to the high country ; while the Shah, victorious everywhere, pressed on to Gheelan, and forced its chief, Hedayut Khan, to fly.

"This opened the eyes of Oghuz Aga. Plunder, not hard-fighting, is the Toorkoman's object, as the agas well know ; and my master, seeing that not gain but danger and loss were all he was likely to acquire by the part he had taken, withdrew to his own country, carrying with him whatever he could lay hands upon ; for to return to his obah empty handed, would have covered him with disgrace ; the very women would have cried *tuph!* on so poor-spirited a chief.

"This, Aga, was my first taste of military life. I loved its excitements, its pleasures, its joyous freedom, its very dangers. It laid open a new

world to me, for it threw me among a totally new and superior set of beings, to those I had lived with hitherto. Among the tribes of the Attock, how could I gather any idea of those courtesies and politeness of more civilized society, which attracted my notice among the persons with whom my first campaigns brought me in contact? and I was powerfully struck by the high endowments, the obvious superiority and gracious demeanour of some among the higher officers with whom I served; for ill assorted as the armies generally were, they always could boast of a portion of veteran and experienced troops. With some of these I was fortunate enough to obtain favour, and whatever trifling acquirements I may possess beyond those of any Toorkoman lad of our obah, is due to the advantages I enjoyed during my three or four years' service in the wars between the Kajar chiefs, and their struggles with the troops of the Vakeel."

"And, by the king's head!" said Hoossien Koolee, "it is well seen that thou did'st profit by them. Wullah! we know something of these Yemoots—a hard-headed, a rough-riding, plundering set they are, who know well enough how to draw a bow, or hold a spear straight in the charge;

but as for manners or courtesy, Allah-il-ullah ! my hound Tirmeh there has ten times more than the best of them ; by your soul ! they are bears."

" That also is true, Aga ; bears they are, and hard can they gripe, as any Pehlewan of the Zor-khaneh. But there are kind hearts and true men amongst them too, Aga—men who will go to death, to redeem their pledged word, and pay the debt of salt ; good leaders, too—cool judicious heads, who can guide a party, plant an ambush—ay, or extricate their followers from one with any chief of the tribes of Iraun, or officer of the Shah.

" Afeeren, Batchah ! thou canst speak for an absent friend too, it seems. But no harm in that ; thou hast told the truth, as I can testify, and contempt on him who should sneer at it. But come, how camest thou, after all, to leave the camp and all its attractions, and return to the obah? What became of thy fighting propensities, when that devil Sheikh Vais was doing his pleasure with the country from Tunnacaboon to Asterabad, plundering towns and burning villages, when every good sword and arm—Toorkoman or Kizzilbash, Yemoot or Kajar—should have taken their part against these dogs of Zend ? Hah !

"What shall I state Aga? Who was I, to take a part or choose a course for myself? I was not my own master—I was nobody. But truth to tell, Aga, there were other reasons; why should I not tell you all? by your soul I will conceal nothing. I have mentioned the sad event that gave me, when yet a child, an interest in the little girl, the daughter of Oghuz Aga and Goolsebah Khanum; can you wonder that this interest increased, as the child grew up into the lovely girl? It may seem strange, that one in my condition—a slave—should have ventured to entertain so warm a feeling for the daughter of his master, or that he should be admitted to so much familiarity with her, even when but a child. But I have already said, that I was regarded as Khaneh Zadeh, and almost in the light of a child of the family. My master's boys by his first wife, were my elders; rough, noisy youths, occasionally rude and overbearing, but neither ill-natured nor jealous; of but mean capacities, they took no share in the domestic affairs of the obah, and spent their time, when not in charge of the cattle, in hunting and smoking with their companions, listening to bards or story-tellers, riding, eating, and sleeping. Oghuz

Aga again, fond of his ease, when at home, but oftener absent on expeditions, paid little attention to the female department of his family, so that, even had there been cause for jealousy or suspicion, there were none to suspect or take alarm. As for the banou, whatever might be her object, so far from thwarting my inclinations, or throwing obstacles in the way of my intercourse with the little Zuleika, she treated me with no small kindness, and left the child free to associate or play with me, as she pleased. It has since become certain, that though the awe she stood in of the fakeereh, whose favour I was known to possess, may have had some share in this remarkable forbearance; there was a deeper and a darker motive for her conduct. Be that as it may, I fell more and more into the habit of attending upon my little charge; and after my own duties were performed, would accompany her to the river to draw water, and assist herself and her companions in the little tasks assigned to them, but which sometimes chanced to be beyond their strength; while on her part, she became so accustomed to this sort of assistance, that she was wont to claim my aid on all occasions, and would fret much, when occasional absence prevented me from rendering

it. I cannot describe the exact nature of my feelings towards the little creature, or their gradual progress from childish affection to that far sweeter and more enthralling sentiment which a youth conceives for the girl whom he has loved as a child, and who has grown along with himself into maturity and beauty; yet still, while growing and strengthening as it did, I never suspected this feeling to be other than the affection of a brother for his sister; of the protector for the protected; and more than all, the attraction of that peculiar and most interesting tie which bound us together from so early a period of our lives, and which continued since to link us more closely together than that of blood itself.

"The pain I felt at parting with her to accompany my first expedition, had I but reflected for a moment, might well have opened my eyes. But when does youth reflect? Even when fully equipped and proud of bearing arms in earnest for the first time, I went and kissed her with far more of exultation than of sorrow. The tears and bitter sobs with which she received me, though they melted my heart at the moment, seemed only those of natural girlish regret; while my own rather moderate uneasiness pointed, as

I then thought, only to the desire of a happy return. Thus did the sweet flower of love grow up and take root in our hearts, unchecked by any chilling doubt, and almost unperceived, until the moment when doomed to be rudely torn up and destroyed.

"So passed our lives, the pain of each temporary separation serving but to enhance the delight of the meeting which followed; and well did the increasing tenderness of the gentle Zuleika repay the toils or wounds of my various expeditions. It was happiness too great to be permanent, and suddenly and harshly was the cup to be dashed from our lips.

"I had marched with the Toorkoman contingent of the troops who, somewhat more than a year ago, undertook, with so much success, the relief of Bostam, when the once victorious Sheikh Vais was forced to fly, and I was returning, after the expiration of our term of service, with my comrades to our camp; when at the village of Finderisk, we met a chupper from the obah proceeding to the army, with a message from Oghuz Aga to one of his sons, whom we had left behind in camp. On questioning him regarding the welfare of our friends and the tidings

of which he was the bearer, he replied, 'All at the obah are well, and great will be their joy when they hear of your success; mashallah! your faces will be white! As for the news, that also is good; for Oghuz Aga is about to strengthen his house by a powerful alliance. Nader Beg, chief of the Jaaffer-boyloo *teereh*, having heard of the beauty of our Aga's daughter, came to the camp to have his eyes enlightened by her presence; and having seen her, he approved, insomuch that he has asked her in marriage, and Oghuz Aga, after some negotiation, has consented to bestow upon him this pearl of our tribe. The *bashlogue*, or purchase-money, has been settled at fifty golden tomauns, a head-dress plentifully adorned with strings of gold and silver coins, a set of silver *yirâk*, or ornaments for her person, one hundred and fifty camels, and a horse, with a full set of ornamented harness for a *khelut*, and I have been sent to Khaleel Aga, her brother, to desire his return to camp, in order to be present at the marriage.'

"Ai vai, Agas! how can I express what I felt while listening to this communication? The first words shot like an ice shaft through my

brain ; my heart seemed riven,—a mist came over my faculties, so that what was said scarce reached my understanding. I was stunned,—I had fallen from heaven to earth,—such an event had never once entered my head, even in a dream. Zuleika married !—to belong to another !—impossible ! my understanding—my heart refused to comprehend it. I felt, indeed, that for me there was to be some great change, a change from light to darkness, but my brain was too confused to take in its whole extent. Alas ! too soon did the painful truth force itself into view. The mist passed away ; I felt that Zuleika was dearer to me than life, —that life itself, without her, were nothing ; yet that she was lost to me already and for ever !

" What further was said, or how I parted with the messenger of evil, I know not ; but this I know, that no sooner had we entered the plain of Gourgaun, than leaving my party at their first munzil, I pushed forward, and, without regard to the fatigue of my horse, scarcely halted until I was within sight of the banks of the Attruck. But when I perceived from a distance the blue smokes of my own obah rising in the evening sun, and could make out the lines of the alachicks

stretching out upon the plain, my heart failed—a shudder of terror came over me, and for awhile I had not courage to proceed.

"As I sat gazing on the quiet scene, while my horse, left to his own will, moved slowly towards his well-known home, or stopped to crop a mouthful of grass, two ring-doves, disturbed by his footsteps, rose and flew towards the right; but before they had gone many yards, a kite from a neighbouring bush pursued them with loud screams. It had just overtaken one of the timid birds, and, moved with compassion, I was fitting an arrow to my bow, in hopes of delivering it and destroying the foul creature, when I heard the rush of wings, and swift as lightning a dark body shot by me from behind. It was a noble falcon, which struck the kite just as it was seizing its prey; and the ring-dove, unhurt, rejoined its mate in the bush to which it had fled for shelter.

"It was a trifle—a thing of mere chance, perhaps; but the excitement of my mind gave importance even to trifles, and, right or wrong, I felt convinced that it came as an omen of good. 'Yes,' said I mentally, 'Allah can deliver us from the hand of the oppressor, as that noble falcon had rescued the poor doves. In the name of Allah, I

will not despair!'—and pressing my heels to my horse's sides, he sprung forward; we swam the Attruck, and soon entering the camp, I alighted at the door of our tent.

"On hearing the tramp of my horse, Oghuz Aga himself came forth. 'Ah, ah, boy! welcome, by my head!' said he—'but how? alone?—where, then, are thy comrades?—how fare they?—and what are thy news?—come, Bismillah!'

"'May peace be with thee, Aga, as with them, inshallah!' replied I, dismounting and kissing his hand; 'my comrades are well, and not far behind. As for our news, they are good: the faces of our people are white in the sight of their chief, for their enemies have fled on the foot of terror and shewed the backs of confusion. The Zend are dispersed, their chief has fled, and Bostam is in the hands of the Kajars.'

"'All this is well, alhumdulillah!—thy news are good, boy, and deserve the mujdeh! But where is my son? heard'st thou aught of him, or sawest thou any one in quest of him from hence?'

"Alas, how this question revived all my pain and confusion! I longed to learn the truth, and to declare all that was in my heart; but my cou-

rage again failed me, and all I could do was to say that I had seen the messenger; that he had gone on to Bostam, where Khaleel Aga was in good health, and that no doubt he would soon be at the obah.

"'And art thou informed of the cause of his coming?' said Oghuz Aga.

"What could I say?—my tongue clave to my jaws. I stammered out at last, 'The cause has reached the ears of thy servant.' But the tone of my voice was so strangely different from my usual free mode of speech, that the Aga started, and looked at me for a moment or two in silence.

"'And is it thus that thou receivest good tidings?' demanded he. 'Hast thou heard how well I have disposed of my daughter—thy playmate—almost thy sister—Zuleika? Does not this call for congratulation from all my household?'

"'Ai vai! congratulations from me? I mumbled something about my devotion to his house, with wishes for his prosperity and happiness, but excused myself on the plea of weariness, for my seeming indifference.

"'Hah! true, that may be; no doubt thou hast ridden far—well, boy, retire, and take care of thyself; thou wilt find the banou and the rest

within—she will tell thee all thou canst desire to know. Bismillah! go thy ways!' And with these words I quitted him, and giving my horse to one of the women, made my way to the banou's tent.

"She was engaged, as usual, in superintending her slaves, who were busied at their respective works; for no one was ever permitted to be idle in her sight. She received me in her usual abrupt though not unkindly manner, and asked me the news of her son and of the party. Returning her salute, I replied to her questions in as unembarrassed a tone as I could, though sick with impatience and anxiety. 'But hast thou heard *our* news?' said she, when I had done—'Knowest thou what has happened here?'

"I replied that I could not tell what she might allude to, but that the Aga had confirmed to me a piece of intelligence which had come to my ears on the road, and which certainly had surprised me.

"'And what may that be?' demanded she.

"I mentioned what I had heard.

"'And this surprised thee!' exclaimed she—"La illahilullah! and what is there wonderful in Zuleika having a suitor, or in that hog Nader Beg desiring a fair wife? Mashallah! she will be well off in a husband, and he will be as well

wived ;' and her scornful laugh satisfied me that there was something displeasing to her in the affair. But just at that moment, who should enter the tent but Zuleika herself, pale and thin, wearing on her head the cap or head-dress which denoted her being a betrothed woman. I staggered back as if I had received a blow ; and she, though at first she ran forward to meet me as usual, stopped short, turned pale, and trembled as she faintly pronounced my name. 'Ah ! Osman !' cried she ; and bursting into a flood of tears, she would have fallen had I not rushed forward and caught her in my arms.

" But not long was she suffered to rest there ; for the banou, though she did not at first exhibit any violent displeasure or surprise, interfered after a moment or two, exclaiming in a tone of real or assumed severity, 'How now, maiden, what conduct is this ?—hast thou so soon forgotten ?—retire—begone ;—retire, I say, for the present : and you children, leave us, all of ye ; I would speak with this youth, and teach him his duty.'

" The slaves immediately withdrew, and I was left alone with the banou, who, motioning me to be seated, cast a searching look upon me, and addressed me as follows :

"'Thou hast heard—thou knowest, thou seest, that that girl is a betrothed woman—the promised bride of another; how then darest thou to lay hands upon her—to take her in thy arms?'

"'What can I say, mother?' replied I; 'my heart is dissolved—my brain is dried up. When I left this place Zuleika was a free maiden—my sister; the being on earth whom I regarded most tenderly. I return and find her lost to me—belonging to another; but the heart cannot so soon forget. Allah, Allah! what dust has fallen on my head!'

"'Thou did'st love this girl, then?'

"'Love her, mother!—Allah! what can I say? Has she not been the light of my eyes—the joy of my heart from childhood until now;—even since that terrible day, mother, when, as well thou may'st remember, her own mother was taken by the angel of death. Love her! have I not watched over her, worked for her, dreamed of her, from that time till now? Has she not been as the life-blood of my heart, which I would now pour out for her as freely as the Attruck gives its waters? As a sister did I love and cherish her, until she grew to be a part of my own heart! Alas, who am I that I should aspire further?"

"'Right—thou did'st love her, then, as a sister, not as a woman. Why then should it move thee that she is to become the wife of another?'

"'Ai, Khodaee! not move me!' exclaimed I, stung to the heart; 'is it not to lose her? to see her no more? Misery! misery! how can I endure it?'

"'So, then, it appears that thy wish is to be always with Zuleika; to live with her and she with thee, and for thee alone; is it not so?'

"'Alla, Alla, mother! Why torture me thus? what need of asking? It would be the height of blessedness; what more could I desire?'

"'Good. It is then plain enough that thy love for Zuleika is just as the love of other youths for other maidens, and not alone as brothers love their sisters?'

"'I fear, I fear, mother, it is even so.'

"'There is no doubt of it, boy; and what then is thy purpose?'

"'Nothing: I have none. What, in the name of Allah, can I do? How am I, a slave, to alter the will of my master, or to compete in power or riches with such as Nader Beg?'

"'Then thou hast made up thy mind to resign the maiden, the beloved of thy heart, without a struggle?'

"'Ai vai, mother!—my mind made up?—wullah! it is like a whirlwind!—I cannot think, I cannot reason!—my soul is turned upside down,—I walk as one who has been stunned!—what can I say or do?'

"'Would'st thou, if thou could'st then, attempt to win Zuleika for thy bride?'

"'Would I?—Oh, Allah! would I not lay down my life for the chance of such happiness!—one hour with her for my bride, and then let death come! But thou mockest, mother—thou hast laid bare my folly—my presumption, and takest this way to punish it. What I, the slave of Oghuz Aga, aspire to be his daughter's husband? Dust on my head for the folly!'

"In spite of my agitation, which was very great, I could not avoid remarking the piercing and peculiar expression with which the banou regarded me as she said,

"'And were such an occurrence to take place, would Osman be the first khanezadeh who has risen to fortune and won his master's daughter? Have not fishermen and camel-drivers become kings and conquerors? and would the Dark Falcon of the Attruck shrink from soaring to raise himself like them? If it be his destiny to become

great, would he thwart the will of Providence by lack of courage ?"

" These words made my soul boil within me. ' Khanum !' said I, ' may your words prove propitious ! they have kindled a fire in my heart ; but it will be for you to keep it burning : complete your work—point out the way for me to go ; by your own soul, I will be ruled by thee !"

" ' Thou wilt consent to be guided by me? It is well. Listen, then ; be prudent for thine own sake. The marriage which thou dread'st shall never take place—I, Zehreh Khatoon, say and swear it—ask not how or why ; but be satisfied that such is my resolution, and such shall be the case. And now I tell thee more—I tell thee that thy love for Zuleika has long been known to me, nor is it hid from me that she returns thy attachment. That the secret desires of both have been viewed by me with approbation, thou may'st gather from the freedom with which ye have been permitted to meet and live together. Spite of your fakeereh, a word of mine had separated ye, and you would have grown up strangers to each other. In this there was a purpose, and be sure it shall be worked out. For that simple thick-skulled man, my husband, who is so dazzled by

this alliance as not to see its folly, he shall be dealt with as he merits. The bridal crown shall indeed replace the chaplet of betrothal upon Zuleika's brow, but not for him he dreams of. For the present, beware thou chafe him not; suggest no doubt, attempt not remonstrance, but rest secure in the power of *my* aid; resume thy usual habits and demeanour; let the surface be smooth, however swift or resistless the current beneath is. In the meantime go seek thy mistress—yes—I have said it—take this as an earnest of my good will. In the inner tent behind thou wilt find her, and alone.'

"With a brain still dizzy from the conversation I have related I left the banou and went straight to the place she had indicated. There, indeed, was Zuleika, her face pressed upon the pillow on which she reclined, and her slender frame convulsed with the sobs which issued from her bosom. Aware of some one's approach she started up, raising her eyes enquiringly, and as the light fell full upon her from the opening in the roof, I read the anguish of her soul imprinted on her countenance; I saw, too, the ravages which grief had made in that beautiful face. She was thin, pale, haggard; and there was a look of

terror in her eyes that went to my very soul. But there was little time to gaze on these painful changes; for scarce had I advanced two paces from the entrance when, recognising me, she sprang forward with a shriek of delight, and throwing her arms about me fell upon my bosom in a fresh passion of tears.

"'Oh, Osman! oh, my brother!' she exclaimed, so soon as her sobs permitted her to speak, 'hast thou indeed returned?—come back to comfort me? Oh, brother, brother! save me—save me from this horrible fate!'—and again did the violence of her anguish shake her as if in an ague fit.

"For some time I could attempt nothing but to soothe and support the poor girl whose reiterated fits of shuddering convulsed her whole frame; and it was long ere she could gather composure to listen to a single word. At length, as I besought her to command her emotion, to take comfort, she exclaimed, 'Comfort!—Oh, Allah! comfort for me? Hast thou heard, Osman, hast thou heard what is to become of me?—where can *I* look for comfort?—oh, Heaven! what will become of me?'—and another burst of sobbing cut short her despairing exclamations.

" 'Listen to me, Zuleika—listen to me, my soul!" said I, when she once more commanded herself. I have heard what thou hast been threatened with; but be at rest—take comfort, I say, for it never shall take place. Thou shalt be freed from this misery, Zuleika,—I, Osman, thy brother, tell thee so; believe me and be comforted.'

"She started at my words, and gazed eagerly in my face with an air at once bewildered and incredulous; then clasping me convulsively with flashing eyes she cried, 'Thou wilt deliver me?—I thought so! I knew it—dear, dear brother!—Oh, thanks be to Allah!—thou wilt save me from this horrid marriage, and I will be thy slave for ever!'

" By degrees, as she became more composed, I told her what good cause I had for such hopes; that the banou was our friend, as she must see, by our being permitted such an interview; but that we must exercise both patience and prudence, under the penalty of forfeiting her assistance.

" The radiant smile on Zuleika's countenance vanished as I said this. 'Thou thinkest the banou our friend, then?' asked she doubtingly: 'thou believest she may be trusted?'

" 'I hope so,' replied I, somewhat startled by

her manner. 'Why should I not, since she has said so? What cause, what object, could she have in deceiving me? Hast *thou* seen any cause for doubt?'

"'I cannot tell; perhaps not; yet it is strange. Thou knowest how cold the banou has ever been to me; yet, since there was talk of this odious marriage, she has been kinder than ever before. What can be the cause of this?'

"'Allah only can tell: she may have her own reasons against it. The banou is a strange woman—a real intriguer; for her motives we may look in vain; but if her actions favour us, let us be content to take the good of them. Allah knows that this detested marriage is more dreaded and abhorred by me even than by thee, if that be possible; for oh, dearest! dost thou not see, dost thou not feel, that he whom thou so often hast called thy brother seeks more than even a brother's rights; that he aspires—would give his very life, to be in the place of the man whom thou abhorrest. He would be thy husband, Zuleika; to guard thee from all harm, to shield thee from even the dread of such a fate as thou hast been doomed to.'

"The dear girl fell again upon my breast; and

hiding there her blushing countenance, murmured 'Ah, dear Osman! I also—oh! often, often have I dreamed of this; but, alas! I dared not—oh! it was a happiness too great even to think of. Well did I know the obstacles, the difficulties, even had you, dearest, thought of your little Zuleika as other than a sister—even now, now that thou hast given me hope.'

"'Ay, now dearest,' replied I; 'even now, when all seems gloom around us, see Providence sends a friend; ay, even in the person whose truth thou hast been doubting, the banou.

"'Ah, the banou! Osman, I dread that woman; her very manner makes me shudder. Yet Allah knows, I may be wrong! and in truth there is reason: but Osman, I must tell you all.'

"'Ay, do my soul, do,' replied I, again soothing her: "we shall not be interrupted; tell me all that has passed from first to last—everything; we shall then know better how to judge.'

"'I will, Osman, I will! I can speak now, Allah! my heart seems lighter already! You shall hear everything, and then you will understand. You remember how sad I was at your departure, and how you, cruel, rallied me upon the excessive lowness of spirits that oppressed me. Alas! was

it not a presage of the misery I was about to suffer? It came full soon, at least; for you had not been gone a week ere a stranger, well mounted and attended, came to the camp, and stopped at my father's tent. Little did I, wretched girl, guess what was preparing for me; it was only afterwards that I learned that this was an envoy from Nader Beg Jaaffer-boyloo, who came to treat with my father about my wretched self! His master, he said, had heard of my beauty. He had wives enough for work; strong active drudges, for striking tents and loading camels, and keeping his slaves to their duty; but he could afford to please his eye: he would have beauty also, and beauty he was resolved to have. He proposed, therefore, to visit Oghuz Aga, to see this daughter; and after judging for himself, to treat, then, for my price.

"'My father was enchanted with these overtures. There had, as you know, been some coolness between the Yemoots of the upper Attruck and the obahs on the shores of the Koolzoom, and among these, the Jaaffer-boyloo had been regarded as the worst disposed; but this proposal was considered as displaying the signal for peace. Besides, Nader Beg was a chief of consequence,

not only in his own tribe, but among that division of the Yemoots generally. It was to be held as a condescension on his part to propose for the daughter of the chief of a simple *Teereh.* As for the wishes of that daughter, you know how little they are thought of or consulted among us; so an answer of the most conciliatory description was sent, and along with it a pressing invitation to visit the obah. The messenger accordingly departed, to communicate these good tidings to the Beg; while my father shortly and exultingly informed me of the honour intended me, and desired that I should prepare to receive my new suitor in such a manner as might tend to fix his intentions in my favour, and secure to myself the desirable position of his bride.

" ' What were my feelings on receiving these commands? you will ask, dear Osman. In truth I can hardly tell you. The tidings conveyed to me were so sudden, so unexpected, their nature and import so little comprehended by me at the time, that my mind was by no means seized with the alarm which afterwards overcame it when aware of my full danger. Abashed and overawed by my father's words, I stood before him trembling and downcast; so that I doubt not he mis-

took my confusion for acquiescence, and imagined me ready to conduct myself as he wished. In fact, I had never much attended to the import of his communication at all. Marriage was a matter that had never occupied my thoughts, nor did I take in any of its consequences—never considered that it would separate me from my home and friends—from *you*, dear Osman ! and everything I had been accustomed to see and to love from childhood upwards ; nor was it until some of our women began to congratulate me, and talk over the details of what was about to be, that I took to reflecting and pondering upon the total and fearful change which the proposed engagement would effect in my own condition. Then, indeed, did terror seize me, and I strove to seek for any possible means of escaping from so dreadful a calamity.

" ' But the indefinite alarm which was caused by the distant view of my danger, was soon quickened into the most lively consternation by its sudden and close approach ; for in little more than a week after the departure of the messenger, came a horseman, with intimation that Nader Beg himself was on his way to the obah ; and, in two or three hours after, the appearance of a cavalcade

of horsemen from the westward proclaimed his close approach.

" ' From the moment it was known in the obah that we were to be so highly honoured, there was a general bustle, particularly in the kannauts of my father. A fat camel was killed, as well as several sheep, and the choicest pieces of both were selected and prepared to form a feast: the finest flour and richest butter were brought forth to make the *côtlemâh*, or buttered cake; quantities of *keskh* was mixed in the coolest water; sweetmeats and dried fruits were produced from the stores; and bags of the finest Mazunderan rice prepared, to be ready for the numerous pillaws. Besides all this, a large supply of *kimmiz*, or fermented camel's-milk, was made ready to gladden their hearts.

" ' As the party approached, my father, attended by the Ak Sakâls of the obah, mounted and went forth to meet his guest. They embraced, as customary, on horseback, and then all returned to the obah, where both men and women stood ready to receive him. I of course was not among them, but I could not help watching through a screen at the door of the women's kannaut, to get a sight of the man whom I dreaded so much. My heart

beat so violently as they approached that I could scarcely stand; and a mist came over my eyes as I distinguished a huge figure riding alongside of my father upon a tall dun horse; for I knew that this must be Nader Beg. As he drew near, an old woman, wife of the chief Ak-sakâl, came forward with a dish of live coals, which she threw down before his horse's feet, with a blessing, as a charm against the evil eye; and when close to the kannaut he dismounted, and the banou, followed by the principal women, advanced and placed their hands upon his arms by way of the customary welcome. My father conducted him into the tent, while an old man muttered sundry prayers and pious ejaculations for the welfare and prosperity of their guest.

"'And what a guest! Though too far distant to remark particulars, I could observe that he was a man of enormous corpulence, and that though his stature did not exceed the middle size, his breadth was so preposterously great, that his head, though covered by a large sheepskin cap, looked like an apple set upon a huge skin of butter! Allah-il-ullah! how I did shudder as I looked at him: but the walls of the kannaut soon hid his hideous person from me; the rest of the party followed

him in; some of the crowd settled round the door—the rest dispersed; and as for me, the painful excitement over, I threw myself on the carpet of the tent, and wept with bitter tears.

"'I was not, however, permitted to shed them long in solitude, for most of the women, after having gratified their curiosity by gazing at the stranger, came pouring into the tent with a flood of questions and remarks, chattering and screaming like a flight of kites and crows over a carcass. I was beset with a thousand impertinencies and pieces of gossip about the great man who had arrived—how he looked, what he had said, and what he had on; but one and all agreed that he was no beauty—in short, that he was dreadfully ugly. Weary and sick at heart, I would fain have got quit of their worrying, but was forced to endure it in silence, till the banou herself entering, put an end to their clamour; and each was sent to take her share in the preparations that were forthwith commenced. The *côtlemah** was kneaded and seathed according to rule; the pots were hung up from their triangles over roaring fires; water-skins were fast emptied into them,

* Buttered cakes generally prepared for guests of distinction.

and whole sheep were cut up for the pillaws. All became bustle and haste; but under the practised superintendence of the banou all proceeded with regularity; and the côtlemah being devoured, the more solid meal was carried in and placed before the guests. This, of course, was done by the male slaves; but many of the women crowded round the door of the tent, and tried to get a sight of the strangers within. Among those I was not, as you may believe; indeed I was unable to give any assistance worth speaking of towards the preparations, nor did the banou herself press me to work.

"'Having retired to our kannaut, where I was seated in great perplexity, I was surprised to see the banou enter the doorway; and still more so, when on my rising she motioned me to sit still, and placed herself beside me. After regarding me for some time with a searching look, she addressed me thus: 'You do not appear much delighted with what is going on, child; has the prospect of becoming the wife of a chief no charms for thee? Hast thou no curiosity to see the man who is disposed to become thy husband?'

"'I never, as you know, Osman, felt at ease with the banou; and this address in no degree

contributed to reassure me. I could not reply for trembling; but kept my eyes fixed upon the ground.

"'Speak, child!' continued she; 'tell me what you think of all this—how do you feel? are you pleased with your prospects?—What, still dumb?—Then I must suppose that you are delighted with the prospect of being numbered among the wives of Nader Beg?—good, *mubaurick!*'

"'Oh! no, no, no!' exclaimed I. 'Allah forbid that I should ever belong to that man!'

"'Barikillah! she has found her tongue at last, it seems, and to some purpose too,' said the banou with a grim smile—'and what may be your objections, hah?'

"'Alas! alas!' said I, bursting into tears; 'who am I that they should make me the wife of a chief—why should I have to leave my father's tent? Let me remain here in the obah—that is all I wish for!'

"'Beheh!—stuff, child!—are not all women born to be wives and mothers to some one, and why should you be made an exception? Is there no one whom you would gladly marry?' and saying this, she again fixed her keen eyes on my

face. I could not stand their look, Osman, and scarcely knowing what I did, I hid my face in my hands and felt the warm tears streaming through my fingers.

"'Umph!—we see how it is,' said she in an under tone, as if speaking to herself. 'Then you would avoid marrying this Jaaffer-boyloo hero?—is it so?'

"'Oh Allah! how eagerly!'

"'Good, we shall see what can be done; meantime, how do you propose to manage with your father?—he is set upon this business, you know.'

"'Allah help me!' cried I, 'what can I do but die, if he require it?'

"'Die!' repeated she scornfully; 'no, girl, no need of dying; you may as well live; be ruled by me, and you need neither marry nor die.'

"'I cast on her a look, which, if it spoke my feelings, must have expressed gratitude mingled with doubt.

"'Ay,' said she, in reply to my look, 'you doubt, but it shall be so, only do as I bid you. Listen, girl; the Beg has come hither purposely to see you, and judge for himself, whether you are worth the sum your father has asked for your

bashlogue or not. This evening, when the crowd shall have departed, your father will invite him to our tent, where they may converse and drink in private; and he will send for you on some errand. See that you make neither objection nor demur; alarm not your father into the notion that you are opposed to his views, or have any desire to thwart him in the match he has set his heart on. Make your appearance. If you are sincere in what you have stated to me, I need not caution you against taking any measures to attract; but let nothing appear which may lead to the suspicion that you *wish* to create disgust. Be courteous, though cold; and remain as short a time as you can in their presence—leave the rest to me.'

"'Half alarmed and half suspicious, though why I could not say, I merely replied with a low-toned *bash ustun*, 'on my head be it;' when the banou, with another piercing look and a smile of dubious expression, quitted the kannaut, leaving me in a state of the greatest doubt and perplexity. Cold and unfeeling, if not positively harsh, as this woman has ever been to me, I could feel no confidence in her promised good offices; and yet, on what or whom else had I to rely?—who was there, even if so disposed, that had the power to

aid me so effectually? As for my father, well did I know that however he might love me, he never would consent to depart from any resolution once formed, nor would either comprehend or believe the extent of my horror at the fate to which it doomed me.

"'Perplexed and distressed, I sat revolving these thoughts, and idly recalling the happier days which had been so grievously interrupted, when no such misfortune hung over me, until the bustle and the noise of feet and tongues began to diminish, and at length altogether died away; when I remembered the banou's words, that my father would retire to our tent with his guest, and started up in alarm lest I might be surprised by them there. Nor were my fears groundless; for just on putting aside the curtain which hung at the door, a bright light glared on my eyes, and I found myself confronted by several men bearing torches, and preceding my father and his guests, who were making their way to the banou's kannaut just as I was quitting it. Scared and confounded, I hesitated a moment—then turned to avoid them; when my father called out 'Who is that?—what thee, my child? Bismillah! come hither and kiss thy father!' But the sound of his voice, and

of the laugh which his guest gave vent to, added so much to my terror that even my father's command lost its weight, and with one hurried glance at the dreaded guest I fled to a small kannaut on the right, belonging to the female slaves.

" ' Entering in haste, scarcely knowing what I did, I was not aware of the banou's presence until I saw her seated at the upper end of the kannaut with her daughter beside her, and felt that her eye was fixed on mine with strong meaning. This added to my confusion, and I slunk into a seat in a corner to hide myself entirely from observation. On recovering myself a little, I remarked that some of the slave-girls were making the kimmiz ready in the usual vessels for being carried in to the guests, and that the apparatus used for making *tea*, that rare beverage, was likewise brought forth. You know how scarce and expensive that precious article is with us, and how seldom it is ever produced. Few indeed among the tribes of the Attock ever saw or tasted it ; but my father having had dealings with the captain of a Russian vessel at Ak teppeh, had obtained from him some of the valuable leaf, together with a vessel used by them for preparing it, and upon great occasions only was it brought forth. It

also happened that I, who had been taught the method of preparing it, was the only one employed in such cases. This, it appeared, was one of these occasions; and accordingly the *semavâr*,* with the small canister containing the dried leaves, had made their appearance.

" 'I might have suspected what was likely to happen from these preparations; but I was too much occupied internally to remark what was passing about me, and was gazing on them with a vacant eye, when a person entering the tent informed the banou that the Aga had called for the kimmiz and the semavâr, and had desired that Zuleika Khatoon should attend to prepare tea for himself and his guest.

" ' Had an arrow struck me, I could not have been more disagreeably roused from my reverie. Mechanically I started up, and would have quitted the place, but that I found the banou's eye fastened on my face with calm significance. It brought me to myself, and with a strong effort to command my emotion, I stood trembling in expectation of her orders. These were soon issued: ' Zuleika, child, you hear—go at once; and you, Nika and Janbajee, carry in the things'—

* The name of the Russian tea-urn.

and adding one of her expressive looks to the emphasis of her words, she waved her hand impatiently.

"'Up we all got, and having put the things in order, proceeded to the tent I had but just left, and where my father had by that time seated himself beside a fire of sticks; while at his right hand, in the place of honour, sat Nader Beg. There were but two other persons present; namely, an old man, an uncle of the Beg's, and Khallee Neaz, the old Ak-sakâl, who you know is so great a companion and friend of my father's. They were seated upon the handsome new carpet that had but just been finished by the banou and myself; and a great lump of fat was burning in a vessel of brass before them, throwing a strong light on every thing in the kannaut.

"'All this I had time to remark while remaining a few seconds behind the two slave-girls, as they placed the kimmiz and the semavâr before the party upon the carpet. It was then only that for the first time I obtained a view of the person who had signified his desire to purchase me as a wife, or *slave*—for where indeed is the real difference! —and what a person it was! Ugh!—I shudder, now to think of him! I had before observed

that he was corpulent—I now saw that he was a monster! His head, in form a cone, the top of which was covered with a huge sheepskin cap, grew wider as it descended, till cheek and chin were lost in the short bull neck, and rested on his round shoulders, as a pear might do upon a gourd; and his body corresponding with the make of his head, swelled out in like mannner below to a size that was perfectly enormous, wholly covering from view the short thick thighs on which he sat. But his countenance! how shall *that* be described? Eyes, so small as scarcely to be perceptible, except for an occasional twinkle that shot from beneath their swelled lids, were set so obliquely in his face, that they seemed squeezed upwards by his huge protuberant cheek-bones, to meet the still more elevated corners of his bare eyebrows. Nose he had none, though its place was marked by two wide nostrils, which opened above a monstrous mouth, with lips swollen like those of a negro. A few bristles sweeping over the upper lip, mingled with others that were thinly sprinkled over the chin, and which partly concealed the singular junction of that feature and lower portion of his cheeks with the neck on which they rested, till all were lost in the clumsy slouch-

ing shoulders. As for his complexion! to what shall I liken it, unless to heated copper?—a dark unwholesome red, like that of leprosy. To my terrified senses he appeared like some ghoul or afreet, who might rather think of feasting on the dead than seeking to wed with the living. Oh, how my soul loathed him, Osman!

"'Good,' said my father; 'so, place these things here before us, and put down the semavâr! Where is my daughter? Ah! right,' added he, as the others, falling back, discovered me to the eyes of the party. 'Come forward, dear;—she is perfection itself at making tea. Wullah! What ails thee, Janum?—approach; none are here but friends, and thy father permits thee; so set to work, and see what thou canst do for us. Enough,' said he to the slave-girls—'ye may leave us; Zuleika is sufficient. Begone! if we want you, we can call.'

"'Ay, by your soul, Oghuz Aga!' said the Beg, 'well may'st thou say she is sufficient. What? should we not be content when we are served by a peri? By the soul of the Prophet! she surpasses her far-famed namesake, the mistress of Yussuff-bin Jacoob, herself!' And having given utterance to this effusion, in a hoarse and

wheezing voice, as if his capacious lungs had a sore contention with their load of fat, he opened his huge fanged mouth, and gave vent to a hideous laugh.

"'Afereen, Aga!' said my father, resolved, as it appeared, to see nothing but excellence in his rich, though unsightly guest, — 'afereen!—thou hast the tongue to win these women. For my part, I never do tell them anything but the truth, and all I look for from them is the same. After all, they have their uses and qualifications, and that girl does not want for them. Slight and slender as you see her, Aga, she is up to many things which would puzzle stouter women. Praise be to Allah! she is a good daughter, and would not make a bad wife: is it not so, young one?'

"'On *my* head be it, Aga,' grunted the Beg; 'few words are wanted to satisfy one of this, Alhumdulillah! The proof is in her looks—she is a rose that the nightingale might be proud to woo, as the poets say.'

"'La-illah-il-ullah! The poets, Aga! In Allah's name, what have we got to do with the poets, or with roses, and nightingales either. She is a good girl, and here is good drink to warm our

hearts; and behold a cup of tea that would put life in a corpse. Hand it to the Aga, girl—give me the other, there. Wullah! a wonderful thing is tea! No, no, Aga! poets are fools: they prate nonsense about moonfaces and cypress waists, and antelope eyes, and bosoms of jasmin, and lips of roses: give me a good horse, a broad plain, a sharp spear, and plenty of plunder for the taking, with a good wife to keep the stuff at home, and to Jehannum with the poets and their trash!

"'Nay, Aga!—what words are these!' murmured the Beg, attempting to modulate his hoarse gurgling voice to an accent of gentle remonstrance. 'The poets are wonderful people—admirable things do they say; by your head, rare tales do they tell, too. When I was at Asterabad once—long ago now, in the time of Mahomed Hoossien Khan Kajar—may his soul rest in Paradise!—there was a poet who came there and recited such verses! All the *Mujlis* were enchanted, and the Khan ordered the Yessawul Bashee to fill his mouth with sugar-candy. Good, was it not, Aga? But, after all, they said that the good things he recited were not his own, but the writings of one Hafiz, or Jâmee, or some such name, a very old poet. They were fine things, though, Wullah!

and plenty about the rose and the nightingale, and many excellent tales about love and wine; so let us have a cup of this same kimmiz, which, by the head of Omar, is not ill made; doubtless the khatoon there had a share in preparing it.'

"'And thus did they go on, Osman, the hideous old Beg every now and then giving vent to preposterous compliments; while my father, who understood nothing in that strain, replied in his plain matter-of-fact way; and on they went, drinking kimmiz so long, that watching my opportunity, I stepped out of the tent and retired to a corner in that where we usually slept. Oh! with what disgust did I look back to the events of this evening—with what profound horror did I think of the man to whom I had been thus exhibited! And how deeply did I vow that no consideration—not the fear of death itself, should induce me to submit to becoming his wife.

"'As for my father, riches and connection had utterly blinded him. I saw it clearly; and saw too, that any attempt to open his eyes—to reason with him on the subject, would be worse than vain; that it would but draw the knot tighter, and fix him more in his purpose. So I

resolved to obey the banou thus far; to keep quiet counsel, and watch what should occur—trusting in Allah for assistance. I knew too, that you, dear Osman, must soon arrive, and from you I looked not only for sympathy, but help. Ah, well might I do so! for I felt that for you I should willingly lay down my own life—and could you be less sensible to my distress, than I should be to yours? I know you could not.

"'Heavily did that night pass away, for little could I sleep; and every now and then would the roar and the noise of the drinking party in the tent come to my ears, and the hoarse growl of my lover's voice, made itself disgustingly prominent.

"'The next day, both my father and he, stupid with their debauch, lounged indolently in the tent; and I was saved from being again exhibited by the intervention of the banou, who sent me out of the way and substituted her own daughter in my room. But in the evening I had again to go through the hateful duty of appearing, to make tea, and hand the kimmiz cups; to hear the Beg's detestable compliments, and draw forth his horrid leers.

"'Sick at heart, and unable to rest, I rose before the other inmates of the tent—even before the sheep and cattle of the camp had begun to rouse their keepers by their lowings. The sky was still grey, and only in the east did a faint white gleam point out where the dawn would break. The dogs rose and growled as I passed; but lay down or fawned on me when they recognised me—and I continued onwards, scarcely knowing whither, until having reached the side of the river, I ascended it as far as a solitary dead tree that stands beside an old tomb at the foot of the mountain. The sun had now risen, but was still hid behind the shoulder of the hill; and a haze which arose from the hollows was blended into a bright mist with the glimmer of his beams, as they slanted up the ground beneath which I stood. It was beautiful, and I was gazing at the brilliant hues which it imparted to the bushes and grass on the mountain; when the sudden appearance of two human figures in this haze, startled me from my reverie. Relieved against the sky, they appeared of gigantic size; and around them was a halo of light as brilliant as a rainbow, so that for a moment I really fancied them some crea-

tures of another race than ours; and my knees trembled under me at the idea. Nor was I relieved by observing, that though one of them wore a female habit, the other was of a strange fantastic shape. All at once, however, they disappeared from view, and I was musing, not without alarm, on what this might portend, when, as suddenly as before, I became aware of a woman clothed in dark garments standing close by my side. A shriek was on my lips; but I with difficulty suppressed it on recognizing the fakeereh Bhowanee, whom I had not seen for long time.

"'I instantly comprehended that it was her whose appearance on the rising ground had startled me; and in a moment I had thrown myself into her arms exclaiming, 'Oh, mother, mother! is it thou?'

"'Ay, daughter, it is I,' said she, tenderly caressing me; and in those soft low tones of hers. 'Fear not, for I come to comfort, not to terrify thee; thou art in distress and in danger—I come to aid thee.'

"'Oh, thanks be to Allah, mother!' exclaimed I, 'thou comest, indeed, in good time; for sorely do I need thy aid!'

"'I know it, my child,' replied she; 'it is that which has brought me hither. Take courage, trust in me. The evil thou fearest, shall not befall thee. Thou knowest my love, and hast seen my power—return to thy home, return in peace and confidence. Fret not thy father by seeming to oppose his will, and trust in the power which is already working for thee to deliver thee from the evil that threatens thee.'

"'Ay, mother!' said I, 'so also says the banou. But knowest thou, that he—he whom I so dread and loathe, is even now in the obah; even now, with my father, who has openly received him and accepted his hateful proposal?'

"'I know it all, my child; yet is he no nearer his end than if he had never left his home on the banks of the Koolzun. For the banou, she has counselled well, though little of good will dost thou owe to her.'

"'Alas! mother,' said I, 'I dread the banou—cold, hard, and terrible as she has ever been to me, can I trust her counsel?'

"'Ay, for in this her own objects and thine agree. The prospect on which thou lookest with disgust, may have attractions for others. Thus

far thou mayest safely trust her; for the rest she is but an engine in the hands of a higher power, and blindly works its will.'

"'Oh, mother, mother!' said I, passionately, 'thou hast been ever kind: what friend have I but thee on earth—in thee I will confide: save me, save me, from this detested marriage, and I will be thy slave for ever!'

"'Be satisfied, my child,' said she, 'no such calamity shall befall thee; return to thy home—obey thy father, and hope for the best. I now must leave thee—hark! I am called, may Allah watch over and protect thee!'

The fakeereh kissed me, turned, and was gone, leaving me soothed and comforted; yet filled with wonder, not less at her opportune appearance, than at the knowledge of all passing events which she obviously possessed. Thou knowest, Osman, how much of mystery and awe has ever belonged to this woman—an awe which with me at least has never yet been effaced, even by the strong affection she has unceasingly bestowed upon me. Yet, surely her presence at this time was a relief which I have not words to express; for worn out as I was with suffering and apprehension, from whence could I have received so much

consolation? For, indeed, Osman, I do give credit to *her* words; and believe, in spite of all adverse appearances, that the fakeereh will, in some way, make good her promises.

"'Thus I returned to the camp with a mind far more at ease than when I left in the morning; and found, as a first fruits of the hope that had sprung up in my breast, that the Beg was just about to leave the place. Before doing so, however, he placed in my father's hands an assortment of ornaments intended for my person, with a horse of value fully caparisoned, and some arms and other rarities for my father. The former included these strings of various coins, which you see in this hateful head-dress; a broad girdle of jointed silver, with ornaments for back and front, at least ten inches broad, all of the same metal and gorgeously set with agates, cornelians, torquoises, and such stones, which, however, are not to be worn until I am a bride, any more than the full head-dress; and that, if if it please Allah, I never shall wear on this occasion!

"'My father then sent for me, when I came trembling, and nearly blind with terror. Some ceremonies were then performed, and I learned

that I was now betrothed to the hateful Nader Beg. Oh, what a thrill of horror did that word give me! Spite of all that the banou or the fakeereh had said, my heart sunk; and when I retired to our own tent, I cried as if this had been the first intimation of my threatened misfortune!

"'The Beg, however, was gone, and I should have felt something like peace again, had it not been for the change in my situation, which his coming had assuredly produced. I was no longer a free maiden; I was the betrothed bride of a great man, and this my companions with their taunts and jests would not suffer me to forget. Still, hope remained; the hope in one whose word had never yet failed, and whom I could not help regarding as possessed of some mysterious power, which was exerted in my favour. But alas! the days rolled on; the time has now approached, Osman, when the hateful Beg will come to claim the performance of my father's promise, of my own involuntary vow; yet nothing has occurred to relieve my growing fears. Such, dear Osman, is my story—my present condition; say now, have I not cause for alarm? Canst thou wonder if I am sad and changed, by weeping and anxiety!'

"'No, by your own soul, no!' said I, embracing her with eager affection—Allah ! what thou hast suffered ; what both have endured ! for I also, dearest, have had my share of misery; Ai-vai! my brain is dried up with terror and anxiety. But I too, Zuleika, have had my omens, and I do believe in the words of the fakeereh. Sorrow, my beloved, may endure for a season, but be sure the sun of joy will rise, and scatter the clouds of perplexity and doubt which now beset our path ; then cheer up, dearest, and trust to better times. For me, I will not leave thee, and should fate still prove adverse'—I was stopped by the approach of footsteps—It was one of the slave-girls sent to call Zuleika. She rose hastily, and wiping the tears from her eyes, obeyed the call, and I also left the tent."

CHAPTER X.

THE "DARK FALCON'S" HISTORY CONTINUED.

On reflecting on all I had heard, I confess that there appeared to me good ground of comfort and hope. The remarkable accordance between the assurances of the banou, and the predictions of the fakeereh, was so striking, that I could not but believe it had its origin in some common purpose; and I could not imagine that the efforts of two such women, directed to the same end, could fail of success. Still, though my spirits were certainly raised, and my hopes improved, and that to Zuleika I maintained a cheerful countenance, my mind was by no means at rest; and I thought that if I could by possibility meet with the fakeereh, she would at least afford me advice and directions for my conduct, if she should not be able to resolve all my doubts. It was long since I had seen her; but the talis-

man she had left with me years before, remained still in my hands. I had often seen her since, and had received from her many a mystic word of encouragement, but nothing till now had occurred to induce me to make use of her charm. This I now resolved to do; and at sunset of the third evening after my return, when the cattle had been driven into their pens, and the watches set, I left the obah, and took my way towards the solitary tree at the old tomb, where the talisman was to be used.

"I had not, however, walked above half the distance, when in passing through a little hollow on the way, I was startled by hearing my name uttered in a sweet and well-known voice. 'Are the eyes of the Dark Falcon hooded,' said it, 'that he cannot see his game?' It was the fakeereh herself, and on raising my eyes, which had been turned thoughtfully upon the ground, I saw her standing on the bank above me, her figure relieved against the pale sky.

"'Thou hast been looked for, my son,' said she; 'the foot of the lover is swift, but thine has tarried long.'

"'Alas mother!' said I, 'it is too true I have, indeed, been long absent. Ah! could I have

bnt known, how swift would have been my return!'

"'Ay! the lark doth not hover long in the sky, when warned by the cry of his mate that the serpent is in her nest; nor doth the sick man long delay to send for his physician. Thou hast come hither to seek me?'

"'Ah, mother, whom have I to trust to but thee? thou knowest the misery of thy children, and thou alone canst give them comfort.'

"'By the mercy of Allah, I can! Doubt not, fear not—perplex yourselves no longer; for know, that the kite shall sooner mate with the dove, than the marriage ye dread shall take place.'

"'Subhaun ullah!' exclaimed I, struck with her obvious allusion to the omen that had met me on my way to the camp; 'thy knowledge is wonderful; my brain is dried up. In the name of Allah say, what must I do? How must I conduct myself, that I may not ignorantly err?'

"Be prudent, be silent, bridle thy passions, which lead men to their ruin, and thwart not the influence of thy star, which now shines brightly on thee. Fate cannot be controlled, but men by their folly may frustrate the benefi-

cent purposes of Providence. The man who vainly struggles against the stream, is bruised against the rocks, though still born along ; while he who submits to its irresistible current, flows gently and unhurt to the haven of his destiny.'

"'Ay, mother,' replied I; 'would that I could promise so to act.—To those who, like thee, can look into the future, prudence and self-control are easy virtues ; but to poor blind mortals who cannot tell which way they ought to turn, self-guidance is a task of difficulty and danger.'

" ' The eyes of men, my son, are closed more frequently by vanity and passion, than by that ignorance of the future which Allah in his wisdom has imposed upon the children of Adam. In the hour of trial search thy breast, and when called upon to act or to speak, beware of precipitation; pause ere thou sayest or doest aught that cannot be recalled, and take counsel of an honest and upright heart.'

"'Ay, such were indeed the true and safe course, mother; but alas ! youth is hot and rash, and passion is strong : can it always be controlled? Then are there not snares and deceivers—false friends and treacherous advisers ? How is the unexperienced eye to distinguish the false from

the true? It is in these very matters that I lack thy aid and counsel.'

"'My son, the Omnipotent has bestowed on his creatures faculties which, if fitly applied, are sufficient to guide them in their earthly path. In these thou art not deficient; what then dost thou fear? what is thy doubt?'

"'Mother, I doubt—I fear myself; I mistrust my own judgment. — Ay, whatever be the consequence, to thee I will say it; the banou, she has counselled me as well as Zuleika—is she to be trusted? ought I to follow her counsel?'

"'I know it, my son, and to thee, as to her, I say, Fear not the banou, and for the present follow her counsel. Hard, unprincipled, and ambitious as she is, her object and thine are for the time the same; both seek to prevent this union. She, because she would exalt her own offspring at whatever price, and especially at the expense of a rival's child. What doth she care, should that child, the daughter of her husband, lose name and character, and sink into the obscurity which must cover the wife of a slave, provided her own child shall gain riches and consequence by the sacrifice? Dost thou comprehend?'

"'Ay mother, it is plain; and what shall I

say? She first laid bare my own heart, and declared what I never dared admit, even to myself, —the wild, the daring nature of my own feelings towards the daughter of my master; her, mother, whom I have loved from childhood as a brother, but whom I never could endure to see given to another: nay, she encouraged me to persevere, and promised to aid me in obtaining my desire.'

"'All this, my son, I know; I know thy lofty aspirations; and I, like her, forbid thee not to hope; a fate, brighter than the promise of thy youth, awaits thee, if thou mar it not by thy own imprudence. Regard the banou but as an instrument of that Providence who can bring good out of evil, and take the wicked in their own snare. For the rest, be watchful, but confident; be continent and prudent, and doubt not of aid in the hour of need. Remember! the Falcon will never permit the dove to become the prey of the kite.'

"She waved her arm and was gone, leaving me greatly relieved, on the whole, yet sorely puzzled and perplexed. There was ever in the manner of the fakeereh, a tone of wayward mystery which seemed to hint at more than passed the lips, leaving much to the imagination; and

never did I feel this more than on the present occasion. Twice had she alluded to that incident which met me as an omen on the bank of the Attruck; and which I had mentioned to no one. Whence was her knowledge of this and of many other matters, of which she could hardly have had cognizance in the ordinary course of things? It was strange—wonderful; yet how fortunate for me that all this extraordinary knowledge should be excited in my favour. 'Bismillah!' cried I mentally; 'may the issue be fortunate—inshallah!"

"Returning to the obah, I resumed my usual course of life. As Oghuz Aga entertained no suspicion of my feelings towards his daughter, and the banou continued to favour our intercourse, it continued unrestrained as before. Perhaps it was the very unreserved and open nature of this intercourse, more even than the voice of prudence and virtue, that checked the promptings of passion, and preserved us from error. But this, as it appeared, was not the banou's object; for, as the fakeereh had darkly intimated, it was on our anticipated fall that she built her chief hope of breaking off the purposed alliance; and for the purpose of betraying us into error

alone it was, that she thus encouraged us to meet so often and under such trying circumstances. But the period of consummation drawing nigh, and her time for active operations being short, she resolved to enlist calumny on her side, to complete what temptation and opportunity had failed to effect. With this purpose she employed her agents to spread rumours abroad, intended to blacken the character of Zuleika in the ears of her intended husband, and implicating me as the partner of her guilt.

"At this very time, an occurrence took place which disturbed the serenity of the obah, and interrupted my intercourse with the inmates of our tent at a very critical period; but not, as it appeared, the intrigues of the banou against me. A misunderstanding had for some time existed between our obah and a camp of Goklans, who inhabited the Moocheeh valley, and were always disposed to mischief; and they chose this peculiar time for sending a marauding party to sweep our pastures. So successful too, were they in their purpose, that, besides a large prey of cattle, and sheep, and camels, they managed to carry off a favourite mare belonging to Oghuz Aga, from which he had reason to expect a valuable foal.

"The affront itself, independent of the loss, was so galling, that although a large proportion of our young men and best warriors were at that moment absent in the Kajar camps, it was resolved to follow the plunderers with the rest, and either retake the stolen animals, or make reprisals—if possible to do both. A dozen of the readiest and most active of our people, were therefore immediately despatched upon the traces of the robbers, with orders to ascertain their route, and keep them in view. The spear and standard of Oghuz Aga was planted at the door of his tent, inviting all who were fit to bear arms in our own camp, and all from others in the neighbourhood, who from lust of plunder, or motives of good-will might be so disposed, to join our party; and thus a very respectable troop was speedily assembled.

"It was my lot to be one of the scouting party, or *carawal*, who, arming and mounting in haste, set out upon the track of the thieves, scarcely an hour after the theft became known in the obah. We soon found their traces, and followed them up the banks of the Attruck to a shallow, where it appeared they had forded the river, for the gravel on either side was pitted with the

trampling of the animals. From this point, we could trace their marks across the valley, to a small ravine, where the beasts appeared to have run very wild, for their hoof-prints spread far and wide. They finally took their course up the hollow, and we followed it for several fursucks, across dry rocky hillocks, until we knew that they must have descended into the Moocheeh valley.

" It was now certain that they could not be far ahead of us; and as we approached the height from which the valley became visible, we proceeded with greater caution, and dismounting from our horses, led them through hollows, and under the brows of the hills, towards a well-known point; for that country was as familiar to each of us, as to the Goklans themselves. We were not deceived; for on reaching it, and cautiously looking down, we saw the whole party still urging the cattle forwards,—though their slow pace shewed that the beasts were thoroughly done up.

" The afternoon was by this time well advanced, and as it was obvious that the wearied cattle must soon be permitted to rest somewhere in the valley, and no doubt by the river-side, for water

and for pasture, it occurred to me that if anything was to be attempted to prevent their being entirely lost to us, it must be done during the approaching night. Our horses were fresh, though we had ridden a considerable distance. The Goklans, indeed, by what we could judge, might amount to eighty or a hundred horsemen ; but then they had ridden more than double the distance ours had come, and had worked their horses hard in driving the unruly cattle ; so that they must, we thought, be pretty well knocked up. Consulting therefore with my comrades, I suggested, that by taking a detour, which would lead us but a fursuck up the valley, we might push on so far in advance, as to place ourselves between them and their route for the morrow, and by keeping them in constant alarm as they moved, and taking advantage of any favourable accident, might possibly succeed in scattering or retarding them, until our large party from camp should come up.

" Accordingly, one of our number being immediately sent back to meet our friends, and acquaint them with our intended plan, as well as to urge them to speed and guide them towards us, we pursued our own way, keeping carefully

concealed among the heights, until it became dark enough to move without fear of discovery; when we descended by a winding hollow, into the valley. The way was rough, and we were forced more than once to swerve from our proper direction, to avoid precipices and dangerous passes; so that the night was well advanced before we reached the point from whence it was our intention to reconnoitre the Goklans.

"The moon, in her first quarter, was already low, so that there was scarcely any light; but as I rode along, with one of my comrades in front of our little party, my eye caught a glimpse of some object in motion on a height in our front against the grey sky. As I looked more earnestly, it seemed to me as if the object became divided into two; but all was so dim and uncertain, that I still hesitated whether or not to give the alarm to my companions, when the *caravwal,* who rode some paces on in front, gave a signal and rode back to us. Almost at the same moment a figure strangely clad, started up as from the ground, right at the head of my horse; and, seizing the bridle, began to gesticulate violently, uttering at the same time some low and unintelligible sounds. Startled and confounded,

I checked the animal to free him from the creature's grasp, griping my sword at the same time, with intent to draw and smite him. But the signs he made were so obviously expressive of entreaty, and not of hostile purpose, that between doubt and curiosity I forbore. My nearest companion, however, less scrupulous, lifted his spear, and exclaiming, 'In the name of Allah the most merciful, what art thou!' would have driven it through the unknown intruder; but he nimbly shifting his position, avoided the blow by slipping to the other side of my horse; and at the same moment, the sweet tones of a well-known voice, in accents so low that they seemed to be meant for me alone, said, 'If the Dark Falcon would strike his prey, let him follow the guide whom Allah sends him.'

"I started and strained my eyes around, but in vain; no one was to be seen but the wild creature still clinging to my bridle. 'Let him alone,' said I to those who were now clustering around us. 'Our fortune is great this night, for this is a guide who may be trusted—on my own head be it!' Some hesitated, and some grumbled; but others had more confidence in me; and a few cautious hints, intimations that

I had good reason for trusting the strange guide, induced the rest to assent; so taking the lead, with the creature still close to the horse's head, we changed our direction for one more to the right, and held on in silence.

"As we proceeded, I looked more attentively at this same guide. It was dark, no doubt; but there was something in the singularity of his figure, with its long, lean, ape-like limbs, and still more in the strangely-shaped head, that startled me as I gazed—and a pang of indescribable and confused recollections thrilled through my mind. Something there was not quite unfamiliar in its aspect, yet where or when I had met with it, I could not by any effort recollect.

"A half-suppressed exclamation forced from me by this mental effort, probably caused the creature to turn and look up on me; and my blood ran cold at observing in his eyes a light which shone like a spark of flame. "Is this a fiend then, after all?" was the thought that first flashed through my brain; but the next brought to remembrance the terrible being from whom the fakeereh had delivered me in the cavern at Mazâr of Parow; and from him it passed like lightning to the imp-like creature that had seized

me when a boy on my first visit to that spot. 'It is he! it is the very same!' said I mentally; and at once relieved from my momentary terror; for that strange being was now connected intimately in my mind with my protectress the fakeereh; and I doubted not for a moment that all these extraordinary beings were of one race, whether belonging to the children of Adam or not. That nought, but good was intended to me and those with me, I was confident of; for the fakeereh herself was engaged, as it appeared, on our side, and when had her presence been otherwise than propitious to me? So with full hopes and improved alacrity, I followed our guide, who, seeing that we no longer hesitated, quitted my bridle and fairly took the lead.

"I saw that instead of continuing our purposed route, towards the resting-place of the Goklan marauders, the course taken by our guide carried us right across the valley, and we soon had to ford a stream, and hold on to the hills on the opposite side. I could now form some notion of the direction meant to be pursued, but not as yet of the manner in which our object was to be attained, and my mind was by no means at ease on the subject. An ugly doubt would still

rise now and then to perplex me, rendering it a sufficiently irksome task to quiet the suspicions and reason away the alarms of my comrades; for how could I inspire them with a confidence I scarcely felt myself, or quiet their fears of treachery and miscarriage? We proceeded however, until after some bad and dangerous riding, we found ourselves, about two hours after midnight, issuing out upon a plain surrounded by rising grounds; and on this, at some distance, might be seen a few flickering sparks, like those from the embers of watch-fires.

"The guide now again approaching me, recommenced his expressive gesticulations, and at the same time seizing hold of my bridle-rein, gave me to understand that we must halt. This we accordingly did; and scarce had our horses' hoofs ceased to beat the ground, when the lowing of cattle at a little distance, betrayed to us that the Goklans and their booty were at hand, and in our front. Almost at the same moment, the low voice was again at my ear, and distinctly uttered these words, 'The prey lies before you; advance with caution and silence, wait for the signal, and charge in two divisions; shout when you hear shouting;—charge and fear not the result.'

"I turned sharply to discover the speaker, but no one was to be seen; so calling attention to what we all heard and saw, and adverting to the good chance we should have of discomfiting a tried and perhaps unwatchful foe by a sudden charge, I proposed that we shoulde divide, and attack from two quarters at once. My comrades at once consented, and we instantly made our arrangements. In a few minutes the word was passed, 'Bismillah!' and on we went in perfect silence.

"For a short distance the way was rough, but we soon reached plainer ground, and could at length distinguish in our front a dark mass, with the gleam of embers here and there, while the uneasy lowing of the cattle and bleating of the sheep, and the roar of the camels, grew more loud and frequent. All at once, a shrill, loud cry was heard on the left; I knew that it was the signal, and answering it with a shout called, 'Forward in the name of Allah!' and on we dashed, our horses catching spirit as it were from our example. 'Allah hoo! Allah hoo!' shouted every man of us, as on we drove; and scarce were the words out of our mouths, when there arose, in several quarters on the other side, a

yell wild enough to have scared us all, had I not expected a diversion of the kind.—'Alhumdulillah!' exclaimed one of my comrades, 'there are our comrades already.'—'Inshallah!' said, I 'but whatever help it be, it is welcome.—Allah hoo! Allah hoo! Hai woorung, Hai tootung Hurroo!'

"In a moment we were upon the mass. The Goklans, who were just rising from the sleep into which they had fallen, no doubt believed it was the whole obah. Few seemed to think of resistance. We saw several jump upon their horses and make off; others fell under the feet of ours and were speared. The cattle, frightened and no longer kept together by the drivers, scattered on all sides, and added to the confusion. We, on our parts, spurred about from one side to another, continuing our shouts in order to deceive our enemies as to the amount of our force; while our unknown coadjutors made a din which confounded me as much as our antagonists.

"Galloping thus through the throng of mingled animals, I found myself all at once close upon the remains of a fire, the embers of which, being scattered about by hasty hoofs and feet, displayed to us a group of men and horses clustering round

an animal of the latter species; and in this object of their care I recognised at once my Aga's favourite mare, covered up carefully with gay clothing. Shouting loudly, I dashed in among them, spearing one of the men, who was just on the point of mounting her; the others fled, panic-struck, and I was left in possession of the prize. Springing from my own horse, I instantly mounted the mare, saddled and accoutered as she was, and led by the continued shouting, made on to join my companions.

"In this way, riding hither and thither as had been agreed upon, dispersing all of the Goklans we could find, about a quarter of an hour had elapsed, when we no longer found any to oppose us. But to gather the scattered booty with our small force, or even to muster together ourselves, was no easy matter; and in truth, having already done so much more than was to be hoped for, little remained for us but to look for the arrival of our friends. Some five or six of us did meet, however, and attempted as well as we could to drive the bulk of the cattle into a mass, and give them a direction homewards; and in this we were aided a good deal by the disposition of the animals themselves to return. By degrees others

of our comrades joined, and though we could not tell what proportion of our own property, or that of others, might be in the dense mass which was moving slowly before us, we were satisfied that no more was to be done; and earnestly did we hope that our friends might appear before the dawn, which was now fast coming on, should betray to any of our enemies, who might in their turn be dogging us, the weakness of the party which had scared them from their booty.

"Wearily did the next hour pass on, and, though so long in the saddle, and in constant exertion, not an eyelid winked, nor did one of us flag in his work. Nothing, too, had hitherto happened to alarm us; but at length the whitening sky gave token that the period of trial had arrived, and that another half hour would determine the fate of our expedition. We had, however, been gradually making progress; and the dawning light showed us, scarcely a thousand paces a-head, the pass by which the spoil had entered the valley, and by which, too, it must leave it on its return. We could now, too, see the spears of our companions, who had not as yet rejoined us, some of whom were aiding in driving on the throng of beasts which they saw

we had gathered together. It was still too gloomy in our rear to judge whether many stragglers of the booty had been left behind; but had such even been the case, there was no possibility of relieving them. We had succeeded so far, and there now remained but to secure what had been done, could we but reach the pass and quit the plain, where our weakness was but too palpable, and if seen would surely provoke attack. But such was not to be our luck, for the light made greater progress than we could do; and scarcely had the first of the beasts entered the jaws of the defile, when a distant shout behind made us look round, and to our horror and perplexity we clearly discerned a strong body of horsemen spurring towards us.

"It was a bitter disappointment; and I believe there were few of us who did not in some degree lose heart. But resolved not even yet to yield without a struggle, and still hoping for the arrival of our friends, we called upon each other to leave the beasts alone, and show front to the enemy. So we turned our faces towards them, and soon saw that a body of about fifty Goklans, part no doubt of the robbers, who had rallied,

were coming up, as we had anticipated, to ascertain the force which had discomfited them, and endeavour, if possible, to regain some portion of their booty. Of us there were but fifteen in all, for the unseen friends who had aided us with their voices during the attack, we neither saw nor heard any more of after the cattle had begun fairly to move from the ground; nor could I at that time imagine who they might be, unless, indeed, my protectress, the fakeereh, had summoned to her aid the jins and demons over whom report had assigned her power.

"Small now, indeed, appeared our chance of safety, for there was no sign of our friends arriving, and to wait where we were, to be surrounded by a troop more than three times our number, would have been madness. Nor was there much to be hoped for from flight; for in our rear was the plain and the enemy; in front, a tract of innumerable small stoney hillocks rose in succession, like sand-ribs drifted by the wind up to the mountains that inclosed the valley on that side; and to climb these with our wearied horses was out of question,—while the only pass by which we could have retreated, was now blocked up by the cattle.

"What was to be done? One hillock, larger than the rest, stood out like an outwork of the pass: it offered a good position for making our stand; so shouting to one another to leave the cattle and take heart, and stand fast, we pushed our horses up the side, and took post on its summit. There springing from our saddles, we prepared ourselves for the event. The Goklans, when they saw us draw off, saluted us with a yell of triumph, but it was clear from the pace at which they came up, that their horses were thoroughly tired, and hope entered our souls, for there was good prospect of being able to maintain our ground for some time at least.

"As they drew near, they divided into two bodies; one of which, some twenty in number, pushed on to stop and turn the cattle, as it seemed; while the rest, riding straight towards our hillock, sent a flight of arrows amongst us, which did us little harm, and then attempted to climb the hill to attack us at close quarters. On this we also took to our bows, and shooting from a height, our arrows flew with better effect, particularly as the steepness of the ascent, and the blown state of their horses, exposed them for a longer time to our aim. They thus soon found

it expedient to retreat out of our reach, when they held a council together. As for us, though encouraged by finding matters not absolutely desperate, so long as arrows remained to us, we were sensible that whenever our quivers should be emptied, we should be almost at their mercy; and all we had for it was, to be as chary as possible of our shot, and to gather carefully all they aimed at us—for we well knew that the Goklans were too skilful at the bow to let us long alone.

"Nor did they; for after a short conference, the party spread, and surrounding the hill, commenced a fresh discharge, which, being sent with greater deliberation, was more effectual; and though we kept ourselves pretty well sheltered behind our horses, several of these were struck, and one or two severely wounded. We drew the shafts, however, of such as were not barbed, and sent them not harmlessly back to their masters with an equally cool aim; but still they were two to our one, and though they cared not to expose themselves much, they did make one or two rushes which it cost us some expenditure of shot to repel. There was also another cause of alarm. We had reason to fear an increase of enemies, either from the gathering together of

dispersed fugitives, or from parties sent out to receive and assist in securing the expected spoil; and in fact, we had the mortification of observing several horsemen actually join the troop opposed to us in the plain, or proceed towards the others who were recovering and turning the cattle.

"At length it became apparent that the efforts of these last had proved successful; for the cattle, after congregating in a mass below us at the entrance of the pass, began again to fluctuate, and at length to stream outwards from it. This was dreadfully mortifying; but what could we do? Our own situation was critical in the extreme; for our arrows were nearly all spent, and our enemies seemed resolved not to leave us behind, either to harass their retreat, or to aid in pursuit. In fact, this movement of the beasts was the signal for a renewed and fiercer attack. Several of us were now struck, and some of the horses quite disabled; while we could see that they also had many badly hurt, for the wounded persons left their comrades, and sat down in the rear, unable at least to take any more part in the skirmish. But now all who were able, rode straight up the hill as far as they could get their horses to go, then rapidly dis-

mounting, prepared under cover of the beasts for a rush on foot, sword or spear in hand. This assault called forth our last reserve of shot, which stopped the career of some; but the rest, more exasperated, persevered; and those even who were wounded, plucking our arrows from their flesh, held on till our spears almost crossed. There was then a moment's pause—we *could* not attempt to fly had we desired it; *they*, somewhat blown and checked by our steady front, seemed half unwilling to provoke our despair. But it was a pause that could not last — indeed, the forward rush was partly made, and I had already seized and severed with my sword a spear which was thrust at my body; when suddenly a thundering yell, which rose from the pass and from among the teppehs near it, arrested the attention of both parties; and looking down we saw the Goklans spurring with all the speed they could make, and the cattle flying on every side before a dense body of horsemen armed with sword and spear. In a moment *our* cry responded to theirs, for we knew our friends: another quarter of an hour and they had been too late. The Goklans knew them also, and abandoning the teppeh, each man tried to re-

gain his horse which had strayed down hill out of the way of the strife; but few ever reached them. Wild with joy at our happy deliverance, we turned upon our assailants, who were proportionably dispirited, and many were speared before they reached the foot of the hill. Most of the rest fell under the swords or spears of our fresh horsemen, so that but few of those who returned to attack us, effected their escape.

"We had now time and opportunity enough to collect, not only our own straggling property, but to catch and carry off many a good horse of those which had borne our enemies to their attack upon ourselves; and thus had my companions and myself the satisfaction of knowing that our efforts had, in reality, been the means of saving the property of the obah, and even of increasing it. One or two of us did, indeed, fall sacrifices to their zeal, and many suffered from wounds, amongst whom was myself: an arrow had transfixed my left arm. But we received great praise, and gained a high name for gallantry and good conduct in the obah, and among the whole tribe.

"But of all the results of this exploit, there was none that gave more satisfaction to the obah

in general, and to its chief in particular, than the recovery of Oghuz Aga's famous mare, which I had been so fortunate as to save from being carried off. My master himself was loud in his praises, and profuse of his assurances that no reward was too great for me; nor was there anything he was not ready to bestow upon me short of the precious mare herself, to testify his sense of my merits. Alas! though his heart was warm and his meaning kind, he little weighed the words he then made use of."

CHAPTER XI.

THE "DARK FALCON'S" STORY CONTINUED.

"For some days after our return to the obah, all was triumph and rejoicing; and those who had borne the brunt of the work, were of course in high favour. To such a length, indeed, was this carried in my own case, that my brain was puffed up with wind; and I had begun to calculate what chance there might be of my claim to the possession of Zuleika being admitted by her father, when, one day on my return to the camp, I was struck by the manner in which I was eyed by some of the household, and speculated on what might have occurred amiss. I made no enquiries, however, but proceeded straight to the alachick of Oghuz Aga, at the front of which he was seated. On observing me, however, he sprang up with fury in his eyes, and roared out, 'Hah! dog, and son of a dog! hast

thou come hither to defile our beards? Hoh, there! fellows seize him, seize the ghorumsaug! by the head of Omar, he shall pay for his rascality!' and seizing me himself, he began to drag me furiously into the tent.

"Astonished at his violence, and at the sudden change of his countenance towards me, I followed unresistingly; till, having got me in, he thrust me rudely from him, exclaiming, 'Base-born scoundrel! canst thou then dare to look me in the face? But thou shalt die, dog! thou shalt die, and that instantly!' and running to his sword which was hanging at the wall of the tent, he would have drawn it and assaulted me forthwith, had not two persons, whom at first I did not observe, risen and laid hold upon him, and sought to soothe this, to me, unaccountable fury. But Oghuz Aga appeared to be beyond all reach of reason, and their efforts were likely to be unavailing, when his wife Zehreh Khatoon hearing the noise I suppose, and probably guessing its cause, entered the tent, and going up to her husband with a determined step, seized his arm and looked him scornfully in the face. 'Oghuz Aga,' said she, 'art thou quite a fool? shame on thy beard, is it thus thou seekest to wash out

a foul stain; to hide a rent in thy garment? Will this violence heal the wound thou hast received? Sit down and return to thy senses. And thou, boy, leave the place; appear not again till thou art sent for—see, the sight of thee makes him frantic!'

"During this explosion I had stood, amazed indeed, and confounded, but supported by indignation and conscious innocence of offence, calm and unabashed, awaiting the result of so extravagant an attack, and watching the countenance of Oghuz Aga, who, on his part, while yielding to the appeal of his wife, kept glaring on me with eyes of fire and foaming mouth.

"'But what is my crime after all?' said I; 'of what am I accused?'

"'Hear ye the ghorumsaug!' roared the Aga. 'Oh scoundrel! to Jehannum with thee!'

"'Go, Osman! begone, I desire thee,' said the banou: and with a bow of acquiescence I quitted the alachick, intending to learn from others, if possible, the cause of this extreme wrath on the part of one who hitherto had been so kind to me. I had proceeded but a few paces, when looking back, I observed following me, one of the persons who had been in the tent; an Ak sakâl, of the

obah who had always been partial to me. I stopped until he joined me, when he said, 'This is a sad piece of folly on thy part, my son; but thou art young, and youth is always wild and rash.—Come; there is no help for it now, thou had best fly to the next obah yonder, my son-in-law will receive thee, and keep thee quiet there, until the Aga's anger shall have cooled; and then the elders will see to make matters up.'

"'May your favour increase, father,' replied I. 'But wherefore should I fly? May I die, if I can understand what all this is about, or what it is that has set the Aga's heart on fire against me thus, Wullah!—What is my fault? what have I done?'

"'Nay my son! but this is sheer folly; after all, what use is there in seeking to conceal what is already known? Rather try now to make the best of the business, and avert, if possible, the consequences of your error.'

"'But, Baba, by your own head! I swear that I know of nothing that I have committed. Allah knows I would not willingly offend my Aga; and for any trifle committed in ignorance, why should he break out against me thus?'

"'Well this is strange, boy! La-illah-il-ullah! call you seducing your Aga's daughter a trifle? Is it nothing to be the cause of breaking off such a match as Oghuz Aga had so fortunately obtained for his daughter Zuleika!'

"'Seducing Zuleika!' repeated I in amazement. 'Subhân ullah! *I* seduce her? Who dares to say that I ever dreamed of such an outrage? Who has been eating this monstrous abomination?'

"'How? you deny it then?'

"'Deny it? ay, by the holy Prophet! most positively and most truly; by your own head Baba! by my Aga's life—by all that is most sacred, it is false. What! I seduce Zuleika? I who love her better than my own life? Oh Allah, never did I dream of so dishonouring her or my Aga's house, of committing such a crime. In the name of Heaven! who is my accuser?'

"'By your head boy, I do not know; I cannot say I comprehend the business, for the Aga was fiercer than fire when he spoke of it. But it seems that messengers have come from Nader Beg, declining to fulfil his engagements with the Aga's daughter, on the plea that some one else, a khanezadeh of the Aga's has been, he finds, before

him, and he loves not spoiled wares. Such is what I have gathered; but who it is that has played tale-bearer to the Beg, or what proof has been offered to him of the fact, wullah! I know not. Our Aga, as thou knowest, is blunt and hot of temper, and he may have jumped to a belief of the tale without sufficient grounds. But what then dost thou think of doing?'

"'Why, what should I do, father, but remain where I am till the Aga's first fury cools, and then boldly assert my innocence? Zuleika will swear to it also. Let him put us to what test he pleases, he will not find us guilty.'

"'That is well; but you said you loved the maiden; how are you to act in regard to that?'

"'Love her, father! Ay, so I do in truth; but as to what is to become of us, or what it were most proper to do, Allah knows, not I.'

"'And why not carry her off, then, to the next obah, as other youths do their mistresses,—as I did myself, when first I took a wife! The Aksakâls will make up matters, no fear. They will settle what bashlogue you must pay, and, inshallah! all will go well.'

"'You forget, father, I am but a slave, not of Toorkoman blood; when would Oghuz Aga

ever consent to give his daughter to such as I? Besides, would not that be just committing the very crime of which I am now falsely accused. No, father, innocent I am, and innocent, inshallah! I will remain. I will take my chance here, and put my trust in Allah!'

"The old man shook his head. 'May God protect you, my son; act as you see best; but my advice is to fly and trust to others,—I understand your feeling,—it is praiseworthy, Mashallah! but Oghuz Aga will not understand it. Take time and consider, and if you find that I can aid you, I will—on my head be it.'

"With these words he left me; and I retired for a little to reflect on what had passed, and consider what course I had best pursue in this distressing affair. But scarcely had I time to collect my thoughts, when a message was brought me by a slave girl from the banou, desiring to see me immediately.

"With no small agitation did I repair to her presence; for I remembered well what had passed on the last occasion, and knew not what part she might take upon the present.

"She was alone, and received me with her customary hard, impenetrable countenance; but

her eye was keenly bent on mine, as if to sift my most secrets thoughts.

"'So this,' she began, after a moment's pause—'this is thy return for indulgence and confidence, young man; this is thy virtue and thy prudence! Praise be to God! it is well. And now, what is thy purpose? what wilt thou do with thyself, and with her whom thou has destroyed?'

"Indignant at the tone she had assumed, well knowing that *she*, who was cognizant of all that occurred in the obah, could not, and did not, believe us guilty; I returned her gaze without quailing, and replied,

"'The banou will excuse her servant, but *she* does *not* believe in his guilt any more than in that of her daughter; what, then, has her servant to dread, or to do, but to drink of the cup of patience, and to submit to the will of Allah?'

"'Thou art then aware of all thou art accused of?'

"'Thy servant has just heard from a friend that he stands accused of the seduction of Zuleika Khatoon; to the banou, the eye of whose understanding is over all that passes around her, he need not again declare his innocence; what more can he have to represent?'

"'Thou art right,' said she, after a pause; 'I do know thee to be innocent of this charge. But hearken now to me: thou rememberest thy promise to be guided by me; if thou desirest happiness or safety, forget not that promise now. Thy Aga, and Nader Beg, believe thee both guilty; let them remain in this belief. Thou shalt fly with thy mistress to the obah of my brother. Means shall be provided, and my brother shall receive thee as a son. He and the elders of the tribe, shall in due time intercede for thee, and thou shalt return to the camp with credit and in favour. Hast thou comprehended? Hah!"

"The banou might well put this question; for her uncompromising openness, and mode of coming at once to her point, had not a little confounded me, and I was pausing to collect my wits for a reply. No doubt that the suggestion she threw out, coupled with the promise of her aid to promote it, offered a strong temptation; but in the first place, to follow her advice would have amounted, not only to an acknowledgment of the very crime of which I was, as yet, innocent, and most desirous to prove myself so, but to its actual commission; and in the second, I could not feel secure of the banou's good faith

in the matter, and dreaded that her purpose might be nothing less than to sacrifice us both, in order to promote her views for her own daughter. I remembered the fakeereh's cautions, which were so much at variance with the banou's advice, and, before opening my lips to reply, resolved to seek that friend and solicit her counsel in the very trying position in which I found myself placed.

"All this passed so rapidly through my brain, that before the banou could repeat her impatient question, I was ready to speak.

"'May the banou's favour never be diminished! What should her servant represent? She proffers to him the first wish of his heart; yet can he so proclaim himself a ghorumsaug, an unprincipled and ungrateful wretch to his Aga, and his benefactor? Never would Oghuz Aga forgive such conduct; and assuredly, go where I might, his just vengeance would fall upon my head.'

"'Coward and wretch!' said the banou, with angry scorn; "hast thou not *my* word that thou *shalt* be forgiven? that thou shalt be safe? and knowest thou not that my words are no vain sounds? But choose for thyself, take the path which I point out and which leads to bliss and

fortune; or follow thine own, and find too late whether it will land thee in disgrace and ruin; ay, and her too whom thou hast declared to be the object of thy love!' And her kindling eye, and inflamed countenance, as she half rose from her seat, proclaimed the wrath that filled her heart.

"For awhile I remained silent, yet composed; betraying not a symptom of the fear with which she doubtless expected to inspire me, and which it would be too much to say that I did not in some degree experience. But a moment's reflection served to convince me that what she desired was, to have me in her power—to make me her tool, and then to destroy us both, innocent or guilty; and the indignation which this conviction excited, enabled me to resist her threats, as well as her arguments.

"'Khanum,' said I, at length; 'God forbid, that I should slight your favour or neglect your counsel; but this is a grave affair, and requires consideration. Let your servant be pardoned if he should require time for reflection. To-morrow, inshallah!'

"'To-morrow!—the day of the fool!' said the banou, disguising the rage which she had at first allowed to break forth, under the cloak of

a scornful laugh. 'To-morrow! ay, if thy Aga permits thee to see to-morrow's dawn in life and liberty!—Yet be it as thou wilt. The hour may not be far distant when thou wilt rue the folly that slighted my proffered aid. Thou may'st depart,—begone!'

"I bowed, and quitting her presence without a moment's delay, left the camp by the quietest path, avoiding all communication or rencounter; for I dreaded being arrested and confined, either by the orders of Oghuz Aga, or the machinations of the banou, and I earnestly wished to seek my old protectress. Evening had now set in, but the moon had risen; the talisman was safe upon my arm; I felt its pressure,—and with an eagerness of spirit that imparted a greater rapidity than usual to my steps, I bounded towards the solitary tree.

"It was not without some touch of awe that I saw the ancient tomb, gleaming hoarily in the moonlight, and by it the skeleton-like form of the one scathed tree standing grimly alone; for I thought of the terrible things I had seen, and the dangers I had run when this tree was first pointed out to me by the very person whose aid I now sought; nor could I, without a momen-

tary thrill, step forward to the hollow beneath it, and place the stone I had taken from my arm, in the spot that had been indicated to me. I did so, uttering the *culmeh*, and I cannot describe the feeling with which I was seized when, on retiring a few paces and looking up, I distinguished the dim lineaments of a human figure, standing scarce three yards distant from the tree itself. It was wonderful,—no spell for compelling the apparition of a jin could have produced a more instantaneous effect; and I stood for some moments stupefied by the consequences of my own act.

"'Doth the Dark Falcon deny his own summons? or have his eyes become dim, that he cannot read its answer?' uttered the melodious voice of the fakeereh. 'What is it he requires?'

"'Allah-il-ullah!' said I at length, drawing a long breath, for a weight seemed to be lifted from my chest by the very sound of her voice. 'May thy coming be propitious, mother! for sorely doth thy son require both thy counsel and thine aid;' and without more ado I recounted shortly to her both the accusation which had been brought against me, and the predicament in which I stood.

"'Thou hast judged aright my son,' said she. 'In taking the most honourable, thou hast chosen also the safest course, as by the mercy of Allah thou shalt find. Did I not warn thee that the banou was hard and ambitious,—that she regarded not the fate of others, so that her own ends were served. She has sought to win thee by a poisoned bait,—but praise be to Allah! she has failed of her purpose. Had she but succeeded in seducing thee to leave the obah as a fugitive, not only thy character, but thy freedom were forfeited, if not thy life itself; for, so far from providing for thy return, her own best interests would require thy utter ruin, and never, be sure, would either of you have been spared to cross her path again. But the wicked shall be taken in their own snare, and their evil purposings shall turn to their own loss. Return not to the camp until to-morrow,—return then in the face of day, and seek thy master's abode. Tell him that though escape was in thy power, thou hast disdained to fly. That trusting to his justice, thou hast returned, after the lapse of a night has given time for reflection, to declare thine innocence, and abide such test as he may deem to be sufficient. The Aga is hot and wrathful, but

well-disposed and liberal when left to his own nature. He will not shut his ear to thee, nor canst thou fail of justifying thyself. But should evil counsel prevail, fear nothing for thyself, nor for her whose name is joined with thine, for a blessed influence protects ye both, and truth will triumph at last. And now depart from hence, and may Allah direct thy path,—for me, I also have my duties.' She turned and was gone, leaving me rooted to the spot in mute reflection on the singular prospect before me."

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